THE HOUSE OF BEAUFORT

THE BASTARD LINE THAT CAPTURED THE CROWN

NATHEN AMIN

VISIT...

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AMBERLEY

For my wife, Katherine.

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Introduction

The Beauforts are a family often encountered when reading or studying the fifteenth century and the Wars of the Roses, although commonly relegated to supporting roles in the life and times of more prominent figures like Richard, duke of York, Edward IV, and Henrys IV, V and VI. They were always in the background, serving a king, counselling a king, and even fighting for or against a king. While highly visible in the stories of others, however, rarely have the Beauforts been the focus themselves.

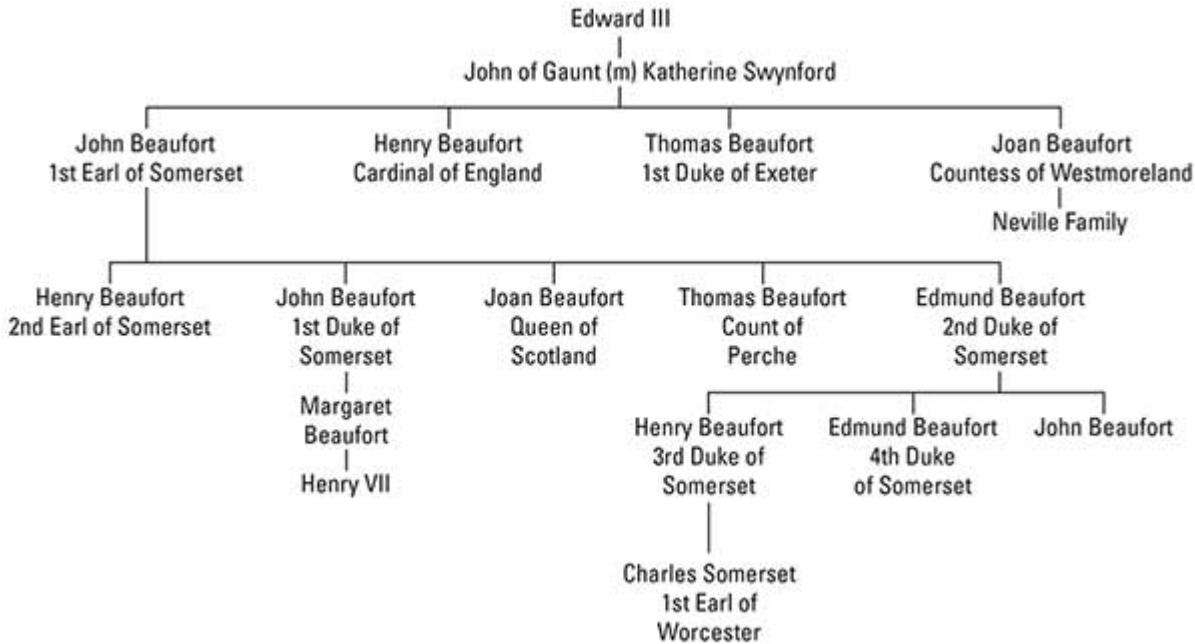
Yet, there were few family units more influential in the governance of England during the period, and none more devoted to defending the Lancastrian dynasty, whether against France in the last vestiges of the Hundred Years War, or against the House of York in a new war of a very different kind. Born as bastards to a mighty prince, the Beauforts were the right-hand men of their royal kinsmen, amassing considerable authority on the national and continental stage. From uncertain beginnings, the Beauforts became earls, dukes and cardinals, and in time kings themselves, their blood seeping into every corner of the English aristocracy within a few generations of their birth.

Many questions arise when one reflects on the lives and times of this intriguing family. Where did the Beaufort name originate? And how did they support their half-brother Henry IV and nephew Henry V during their various military campaigns, both at home and abroad? Was Cardinal Beaufort as corrupt and scheming as Shakespeare suggested? Did Edmund Beaufort father Katherine de Valois' children? Why were the Beauforts targeted by the Yorkists during the Wars of the Roses, and just how weak was the Beaufort-descended Henry Tudor's claim to the throne in 1485?

The story of the Beauforts, of their rise, fall and rise again, is the story of England during the fifteenth century, a dramatic period of war, intrigue and scandal. It is a story that deserves to be heard, not

merely in relation to their father John of Gaunt, their Lancastrian or Yorkist royal cousins or their Tudor successors, but rather in its own right. One hopes this book will finally bring the family out of the shadow of kings to stand alone as one of England's mightiest dynasties – the House of Beaufort.

Nathen Amin
York


Edward III
John of Gaunt (m) Katherine Swynford
John Beaufort
1st Earl of Somerset
Henry Beaufort
Cardinal of England
Thomas Beaufort
1st Duke of Exeter
Joan Beaufort
Countess of Westmoreland
Neville Family
Henry Beaufort
2nd Earl of Somerset
John Beaufort
1st Duke of
Somerset
Margaret
Beaufort
Henry VII
Joan Beaufort
Queen of
Scotland
Thomas Beaufort
Count of
Perche
Edmund Beaufort
2nd Duke of
Somerset
Henry Beaufort
3rd Duke of
Somerset
Edmund Beaufort
4th Duke
of Somerset
John Beaufort
Charles Somerset
1st Earl of
Worcester

Prologue

30 October 1485, Westminster Abbey

> Sirs here is present Henry, rightfull and indoubted enheritor by the Lawes of god and man to the Crowne and royall dignitie of England[1]

St Edward's Crown, resplendent in all its golden glory, was being held above the brown-haired head of a slender twenty-eight-year-old who had, until two months earlier, been a stranger to the country he was now invited to rule. The small blue eyes of this new king of England were focused, his mind resolute that this very day was the will of God. Many in the kingdom, not just the man now occupying the throne, interpreted the victory of his disparate army on a bloody battlefield under the Leicestershire sun as divine judgement. In his left hand he held a golden sceptre topped with a cross, while in his right hand he clutched another sceptre, mounted with a dove. The former represented his new temporal power while the latter symbolised a monarch's spiritual authority, both of which were now vested in the royal person of Henry Tudor.

The venerated, if aged, hands that held the crown belonged to Cardinal Thomas Bourchier, archbishop of Canterbury and a clergyman who had witnessed the turmoil and tragedy of the previous forty years at close quarters. Due to the cardinal's growing infirmity, he was ably assisted during the ceremony by Peter Courtenay and John Morton, bishops of Exeter and Ely respectively, and men who had spent considerable time with Henry in exile, establishing close relations with the man they now sought to serve. As the elderly archbishop lowered the crown onto Henry's head, he was symbolically bestowing kingship upon no fewer than his third English sovereign; Bourchier had crowned Edward IV in 1461 and Richard III in 1483, as

well as crowning Edward's wife Elizabeth Wydeville as queen in 1465. The name of Henry Tudor was now added to that prestigious list.

As would become the standard for Tudor public ceremony over the next century, no expense was spared on the opulent occasion. There was good reason for this; Henry VII had been an unknown stranger to his new subjects before the Battle of Bosworth, and he was keen to ensure he converted any doubters with lavish festivities to mark his accession. From day one, the Tudors readily acknowledged the need to put on majestic displays to conceal any flaws in their claim to the throne. It is unsurprising to later read the king's court historian Bernard André describe the occasion as a 'most excellent coronation'.[2] The Tudors had arrived.

Throughout the day, the king appeared glorious in the new garments procured for the ancient rituals. Significant sums of money had been spent on items such as a velvet jacket with black and ermine furs, while during the day he proudly bore a surcoat crafted from fine blue cloth. Henry augmented his regal costume with a long gown of crimson cloth of gold and also had robes fashioned from crimson velvet and satin. A luxurious doublet of cloth of gold, as well as another doublet of black satin, had also been tailored for the king, who cut a glittering figure in front of his curious subjects.[3] London's goldsmiths, embroiderers and cloth merchants had clearly done brisk business in the weeks preceding the coronation.

Apart from the king, the coronation of Henry VII represented the triumph of several other individuals among his affinity. Many had recently been granted estates and titles from an appreciative Henry, and the ceremony was as much their celebration as it was the king's. Henry's devoted and resilient uncle Jasper Tudor was one such figure, having been rewarded for rescuing his brother's son from the Yorkists at the age of fourteen and fleeing to Brittany, then France, where the pair remained until only three weeks before Bosworth. It was Jasper who was given the fitting honour of bearing his nephew's crown through the abbey, while others given prominent roles included Thomas Stanley, recently created earl of Derby and stepfather of the

king, and John de Vere, 13th Earl of Oxford, a skilled commander who had been integral in securing victory at Bosworth. Derby was entrusted with bearing the Sword of State during the procession while Oxford was granted the honour of bearing the king's train.[4]

Throughout the ceremony, the loud lamentations of an anguished woman threatened to disrupt the solemn proceedings. The tearful lady in question was the king's beloved mother Lady Margaret Beaufort, Stanley's wife and widow of Henry's father Edmund Tudor, earl of Richmond. It was apparent the countess had become stricken with fear for her only child, perhaps anticipating a series of threats to his person once settled upon the throne. During the funeral sermon given by Bishop John Fisher after Margaret's death in 1509, her behaviour during the coronation was recalled, with Fisher noting how she would 'dredde the adversyte' and that when 'the Kynge her Son was Crowned, in all that grete tryumphe and glory, she wept mervaylously'.[5] Margaret's reaction seems extraordinary when one considers the momentous occasion, particularly as her son's accession would bring her unparalleled influence, wealth and political sway as the king's mother. What had prompted such a tearful outpouring of dread?

For Margaret, her only child's coronation represented not only the unlikely triumph of the Welsh-born Tudors, but also that of her own ancestors, the Beauforts. The family traced their origin to 1372 and the birth of Margaret's grandfather John Beaufort, an illegitimate son of John of Gaunt, the exceptionally wealthy duke of Lancaster and the third son of Edward III.

The Beauforts were, therefore, royally descended, and after their retrospective legitimisation in 1397 became loyal adherents to the first three Lancastrian monarchs, amassing considerable influence in the process. By 1471, however, it was Margaret alone who survived as the last living male-line member of her family, a status she wore with brazen pride, a sentiment similarly borne by her only son. It was, after all, Beaufort blood that gave Henry his slender claim to the throne.

On the day of Henry's coronation, several royal and dynastic

emblems were liberally displayed on banners and tapestries throughout London, including generic insignia such as the English coat of arms and the badges of saints Edmund the Martyr and Edward the Confessor. The new king had been particularly keen to draw attention to three of his own adopted emblems. The first was the red rose, which the king embraced to signify his kinship to the House of Lancaster and his uncle Henry VI, his father's half-brother. The second was a red dragon, an ancient symbol purportedly borne by the seventh-century Welsh king Cadwaladr, from whom the Tudors claimed descent.[6] The third symbol freely employed by the new king was that of a portcullis.

In an era when heraldry was as recognisable as big brands are in the present day, those assembled in the abbey were acutely aware to whom the king was alluding, for the portcullis was an established Beaufort emblem synonymous with the family's earlier members, including Henry's grandfather and great-grandfather, both named John. The king would later use the motto *altera securitas* with the portcullis badge, stressing that his Beaufort ancestry only served to bolster his claim to a throne he had boldly claimed by right of conquest.[7] If anyone at the coronation celebrations remained in doubt as to the king's pride in his maternal lineage, the substantial figure of £50 was spent commissioning 105 silver and gilt portcullises for distribution during the day. The purpose of this costly exercise was clear: to advertise the throne now belonged to the Beauforts, if not in name, then certainly in spirit.

The improbable rise of Henry Tudor from penniless Welsh exile to king of England is one of the most remarkable episodes in British history, but the role played by his maternal Beaufort relations in this rise is often overlooked. The Beauforts had been born as bastards to a royal duke and his foreign-born mistress in uncertain circumstances; they had risen to become earls, dukes and cardinals, securing untold wealth and influence throughout the first half of the fifteenth century before losing everything in a series of catastrophic battles between 1455 and 1471. It was the gradual collapse of this mighty family during the Wars of the Roses that paved the way for Henry Tudor to

take up the Beaufort cause in lieu of his mother. The Tudor triumph represented the resurgence of the Beauforts.

And yet, in the momentous setting of Westminster Abbey and amidst the unbridled merriment of those present, Margaret Beaufort 'ryghte tenderly' wept.[8] Though her beloved son, who 'from a grave and serious child, had become a gallant and victorious Prince',[9] now occupied the throne, the tribulations of her family had preconditioned the countess to presume that soaring highs were inevitably followed by crushing lows. As Bishop Fisher summarised at her funeral, 'whereyn she had full grete joy, she let not to saye that some adversyte wolde followe'.[10]

When one considers the Beauforts' tumultuous existence throughout the fifteenth century, Margaret's attitude is perhaps easily understood. Geoffrey Chaucer, a kinsman of the earlier Beauforts through marriage, captured such anxiety perfectly in 'The Monk's Tale' when he wrote,

> And thus does Fortune's wheel turn treacherously, and out of happiness bring men to sorrow.

From happiness to sorrow; it could almost have been a Beaufort family motto.

1

Beaufort of Lancaster
1340–1372

The piercing cry of a newborn child reverberated around the candlelit chamber, echoing off the cold stone walls and noisily announcing to an anxious audience the arrival of another soul into the world. The midwife, mindful of fever and hoping to assuage the baby boy's fear, swaddled the child before tending to the needs of the exhausted mother. As with all births during the medieval period, there was an enhanced risk of both mother and child succumbing to the after-effects of the birthing process, so the most pressing concern of those in the room was to ensure the pair's survival. Postpartum infections were a particular concern, regardless of the wealth and status of those involved.

The midwife's duties during the fourteenth century included cutting the baby's umbilical cord and evaluating the body for any noticeable physical deformities. The mother, after a traumatic experience without the aid of modern pain relief, was expected to rest in the darkened lying-in chamber for up to a month, particularly if she was of the noble classes. In keeping with Catholic doctrine, the baby boy was baptised shortly after his birth, with a priest washing away original sin and cleansing the child of any evil.

This particular child was christened John, taking the name of his father, John of Gaunt, 1st Duke of Lancaster and one of the mightiest noblemen in the kingdom. The boy's grandfather was the king of England, the 'gallant and noble King Edward III',[1] who had occupied his throne for more than forty years. This was a baby with an impeccable paternal ancestry, which included eight kings of England dating back to William the Conqueror and connections with most

European royal houses.

Although the birth of a son to such a prominent figure as the duke often prompted ostentatious celebration, there were no such festivities for baby John. The details of the birth do not exist in the records and the event was ignored by the chroniclers. There was good reason for this; John was born out of wedlock and, as a bastard, was of little interest to anyone outside his immediate family.

His mother was Katherine Swynford, a widow who had been the duke's mistress 'for many years',[2] and although later developments suggested her relationship with the duke was founded on mutual feelings of affection, perhaps even love, the situation at the time of their son's birth was complex. Gaunt may have been by far the richest and most powerful member of the aristocracy, but he was also a married man. Out of consideration for his wife, the Castilian *Infanta* Constance, through whom he held great dynastic ambition, a degree of discretion was prudent.

The precise particulars of John's birth are, therefore, scarce. The date is uncertain, while the location also remains unidentifiable. There is, however, circumstantial evidence to put forward some theories about the event. A series of gifts and grants were made to Katherine by the duke over thirteen months in 1372 and 1373, perhaps an indication of a sudden change in her physical condition. On 1 May 1372, Gaunt bestowed a gift of £10 upon Katherine, while two weeks later another grant was issued for an annuity of 50 marks. On 20 June, Lady Swynford was granted wardship of the Lincolnshire lands of her late husband, while just over one year later Katherine was presented with the gift of three bucks. Finally, on 28 June 1373, she took receipt of several oaks.[3]

Although such generosity may be casually explained as the romantic offerings of a man to his mistress, the nature of these grants suggests a concerted attempt to enhance Katherine's living conditions. It seems rational to suggest this was because she was with child during this twelve-month period and Gaunt felt duty-bound to provide for the widow he had impregnated during the course of their affair. It

also seems reasonable to propose that the birth may have taken place at her manor of Kettlethorpe, in the heart of Lincolnshire, one of the estates she inherited from her deceased husband.

As a bastard, baby John required an appropriate surname. He had no entitlement to his mother's married name of Swynford, and it wasn't proper for him to use his father's title. The names John Swynford or John Lancaster were, therefore, rejected as possiblities. The matter was settled when the decision was taken, presumably with Gaunt's endorsement, to bestow upon the child a name inspired by a former French possession of the duke. The bastard was henceforth known as John Beaufort, the founding member of the dynasty that would conspicuously bear this name for the next century. Chronicler Jean Froissart later referred to John, a 'great favourite' of his father, as 'Beaufort of Lancaster',[4] suggesting that although his birth did not merit much attention, it wasn't long before the duke's secret child became widely acknowledged.

Why was the name Beaufort chosen? The extent of Gaunt's personal involvement with the château and lordship of Beaufort is unclear, but it's likely the shrewd duke wished to confer upon any illegitimate children a name that was not connected to any Lancastrian estate or title still in his possession, circumventing any potential conflicts between his legitimate heir Henry of Bolingbroke and his half-siblings. It has often been proposed that the Beaufort lordship was in Anjou and was where Gaunt's illegitimate brood were secretly born, but this is very unlikely on both accounts.

The château that belonged to Gaunt was based near the modern village of Montmorency-Beaufort, in the Aube *department* in the Champagne region of north-eastern France. This lordship became part of the Lancastrian estates through Blanche of Artois, the niece of King Louis IX of France, queen consort of Navarre by virtue of her first marriage, and ancestress of the Lancastrians through her second marriage to Edmund, 1st Earl of Lancaster. Blanche came into ownership of the castle and lordship of Beaufort in 1270, and brought it to her marriage to Edmund in 1276. It was eventually inherited by

their eldest son Thomas and, after his execution in 1322, by his younger brother Henry, the third Lancastrian earl.[5]

As husband to the granddaughter of the 3rd Earl, John of Gaunt inherited the entirety of the Lancastrian estate shortly after his marriage, including Blanche of Artois' lordship of Beaufort. He would not enjoy its facilities for long, if at all, as it was lost to the French in 1369 when his Welsh tenant Ieuan Wyn defected,[6] presumably prompted by the Welshman's allegiance to Owain Lawgoch, a soldier based in France actively campaigning against the English in a desperate attempt to assert his claim as Prince of Wales. Through Ieuan Wyn's betrayal, the lordship of Beaufort was therefore lost a few years before the birth of the eldest Beaufort child, never to be regained.

The Beaufort name, however, proved more resilient, embedding itself into the annals of English history through the sheer determination of those who would bear the name. From the moment John Beaufort was born, probably in the Lincolnshire area his mother considered home, the destinies of the houses of Beaufort and Lancaster became irrevocably entwined. They would rise together, and ultimately fall together.

*

John Beaufort was not the first child for either of his parents, who could hardly be accused of indulging in the recklessness of youth. At the time of John's birth, Katherine was probably around twenty-two years old while the duke was a decade older.

Katherine Swynford was born Katherine de Roët around November 1350 in the County of Hainault, a self-governing lordship within the jurisdiction of the Holy Roman Empire. Her father was a renowned soldier named Paon, or Payne, de Roët, and he was associated with the retinue of Philippa of Hainault, daughter of the duchy's count William I. On 24 January 1328, Philippa became queen of England following her marriage to Edward III in York Minister, and as a result many of her countrymen followed her across the English Channel,

including Paon de Roët.

Paon's service in the queen's entourage was recognised by Edward III, who knighted the soldier and appointed him King of Arms of Guienne.[7] His opportunities for social progression in England were not limitless, however, and he secured a position with the queen's sister Margaret, the consort of the Holy Roman Emperor, shortly afterwards. Considering his status as a servant of his Queen Philippa, it is somewhat ironic that only two decades later the two Hainaulters would be the mutual grandparents of the first generation of Beauforts.

Shortly after Paon's withdrawal to the continent, young Katherine de Roët became a ward of the queen, and was raised amid the glamour of the royal court, imbuing her with the confidence to socialise effortlessly with nobility during adulthood. By 1365, the teenaged Roët girl is known to have been married to Hugh Swynford, a son of Sir Thomas de Swynford of Kettlethorpe in Lincolnshire, as she is referenced under the Swynford name after receiving private mass from John Buckingham, bishop of Lincoln.[8] For a prelate like Buckingham to conduct mass personally for Katherine is indicative of her noteworthy connections, even at this early point in her life, and she is indeed noted in the bishop's register as a servant of Blanche, the duchess of Lancaster and the first wife of Katherine's future lover, John of Gaunt. Was Katherine hearing mass in private because she was particularly pious, or were there circumstances compelling her to seek the blessings of God?

Although the Swynford marriage was a respectable union, decamping to rural Lincolnshire may have proved disheartening for Katherine. Though she was now the lady of the manors of Kettlethorpe and Coleby, her husband's inheritance was mediocre at best. Kettlethorpe's lands, about ten miles north-west of Lincoln, were prone to flooding due their proximity to the River Trent while the land at Coleby, estimated to be about ninety acres in total with fifteen reserved for pasture, was regarded as 'sandy and stone' due its lack of cultivation.[9]

Though there are no existing documents to speculate on the

relationship between husband and wife, the Swynford marriage did produce three children in short succession: Blanche, Thomas and Margaret. Their dates of birth are unknown but all three appear to have been born during the mid-1460s with consecutive pregnancies occurring despite Sir Hugh's regular absence due to military commitments. If the teenage Katherine was not enamoured of her meagre livelihood in Lincolnshire, she had nevertheless fulfilled her marital obligations in providing her husband with a male Swnyford heir.

As a tenant of the duke of Lancaster, Sir Hugh frequently campaigned in France as part of Edward III's protracted conflict over the succession of the French crown, later known as the Hundred Years War. In 1366, Swynford was based in Aquitaine in south-western France and, apart from sporadic recuperative journeys back to England to visit his growing family, was fighting abroad until his death in November 1371. Details of his demise are scarce, other than that it occurred 'beyond the seas'.[10]

The death of her husband was a bitter blow for Katherine, left a widow to raise three young children. The manors of Kettlethorpe and Coleby, with other assorted lands in the area, were bequeathed to her on behalf of her four-year-old son Thomas, although a condition of the grant was that she could not remarry without the king's licence.

Although Katherine had no obvious family members to turn to for assistance, she had already established close relations with the duke and duchess of Lancaster, possibly owing to her upbringing in the court of the duke's mother, Queen Philippa. Notably, she found employment in the nursery of the duke's children, where she was charged with helping raise his two daughters, Philippa and Elizabeth, with Blanche of Lancaster. It was this position that almost certainly brought her into regular contact with John of Gaunt.

The duke, a proud and ambitious prince motivated by the pursuit of power and influence, was acutely aware of his regal lineage. As the fourth son of Edward III and Philippa of Hainault, and the third to survive childhood, Gaunt thrived in his role as one of the mightiest

nobles in the kingdom. He was born in St Bavo's Abbey in Ghent, which the English pronounced Gaunt, in March 1340 while his father had been briefly based in the city. The English king had been in the Low Counties seeking a foreign alliance as part of his dogged attempt to capture the French throne, which he claimed in right of his mother, Isabella. Three of Isabella's brothers had been successive kings of France, and after the death of the third, Charles IV, the crown passed, in accordance with French law, to her distant cousin Philip of Valois, prompting Edward's opportunistic campaign.

In September 1342, Gaunt, although only two years old, was invested with the earldom and honour of Richmond and, like his elder brothers Edward and Lionel, was raised with expectations of serving his warrior father in matters of warfare. The adolescent earl observed several battles alongside his father and siblings during the 1350s, including the fierce Battle of Winchelsea in 1350 and the 'burnt Candlemas' campaign of 1356 in which Gaunt's father ruthlessly 'vented his wrath in reckless and indiscriminate destruction, burning every town and village'[11] he encountered in the Lothian region of Scotland. By 1359, the nineteen-year-old Gaunt was for the first time entrusted with his own retinue in France and, on 23 April 1361, once he had reached the required age of twenty-one, was formally inducted into his father's prestigious chivalric order as a Knight of the Garter. From an early age, it was clear Gaunt was expected to play an integral role in the political landscape of England over the course of his life.

With his abilities as a military commander firmly established, although 'distinguishing himself by his courage rather than by his skill',[12] attention naturally turned to securing his position in England. Gaunt married his third cousin Blanche in Reading Abbey on 19 May 1359, with their first child, Philippa, born in March the following year. Blanche's father Henry, 1st Duke of Lancaster and 4th Earl of Derby, was the wealthiest nobleman in the land, a close companion-in-arms of Edward III and the king's trusted confidant. It was an auspicious match for the young earl, considerably enhanced upon his father-in-law's death on 23 March 1361 at Leicester Castle.

With no male heir, the duke's two daughters were recognised as co-heirs of the vast Lancastrian inheritance, but fortune favoured Gaunt, for in April 1362 his sister-in-law Maud also passed away, allowing John to claim the entire Lancaster estate *jure uxoris*, or by right of his wife. This included the earldoms of Lancaster, Leicester and Derby, as well as the baronetcies of Bowland and Halton. He was also named lord of Beaufort and Nogent in France, extending his influence across the Channel.[13] Gaunt's rise was capped on 13 November 1362 when he was elevated to the dukedom of Lancaster by his father.

At only twenty-two years old, John of Gaunt possessed an income above that of any other person in England, except for his father the king. The extensive Lancastrian hegemony, which included more than thirty castles, also enabled the duke to raise an army of a thousand men, with an affinity widely considered one of the largest ever assembled in medieval England. It was an amassing of riches and influence almost unfathomable to his compatriots, and it was to his marriage, it was said, Gaunt owed 'his wealth, his power, and his prominence'.[14] In time the Beauforts would also benefit from this union, though they were not actually descended from it.

In early 1363, Blanche of Lancaster gave birth to their second child Elizabeth, and she delivered Gaunt a male heir in April 1367 at Bolingbroke Castle in Lincolnshire. The child was baptised Henry, but would not have the chance of knowing his mother. On 12 September 1368, Blanche passed away at Tutbury Castle in Staffordshire, leaving the duke a widower at only twenty-eight years old. Gaunt would mournfully observe the anniversary of her death for the remainder of his life, and commissioned a sombre tribute to be written by a young poet named Geoffrey Chaucer, known as the *Boke of the Duchesse* or the *Death of Blanche Duchess of Lancaster*.[15]

Chaucer had been a long-time acquaintance of the duke's, probably coming to Gaunt's notice as early as 1359 when the aspiring poet was captured at the Siege of Rheims and had his ransom personally paid by the king. He was also connected to the duke through Gaunt's

governess Katherine Swynford, for prior to September 1366 Chaucer had married Philippa de Roët, Katherine's sister and herself a lady-in-waiting to the queen, the duke's mother. Both Gaunt and Chaucer produced children with the de Roët women, their offspring growing up aware of their maternal kinship during the reigns of Henrys IV and V.

By 1372, some four years after the death of Blanche of Lancaster, Gaunt had started a relationship with Katherine, evident from the multitude of grants issued to her throughout that year by the duke. That Gaunt was closely connected to Katherine prior to their liaison is not in doubt; she had been part of his daughters' nursery, a former servant to his wife, daughter of one of his mother's knights, the sister-in-law of Chaucer and the wife of one of his tenants. They were clearly well acquainted and inevitably had many opportunities to develop a mutual attraction when their paths crossed. Regardless of any romantic notions, however, marriage was not an option, for Gaunt was no longer a free man.

In September 1371, despite his grief for Blanche and coldly disregarding any affection for Katherine, the duke had taken another wife. The sober reality for a royal magnate of his standing was that alliances needed to be made, both in his interest and of the kingdom. Such an opportunity had now presented itself, and Katherine Swynford, pregnant or otherwise, had no option but to step aside and bide her time.

2

The Duke's Beloved Dame
1372–1382

The Castilian Civil War was a 'grim and murderous'[1] affair that was fought between two sons of the deceased Alfonso XI between 1366 and 1369. Pedro I was ultimately deposed and viciously stabbed to death by his half-brother Enrique, Count of Trastámara, after the Battle of Montiel in March 1369.

Although the war had been fought on the Iberian Peninsula, its bloody impact was felt further afield when the two rival factions had desperately canvassed other countries for assistance, with Pedro, forced to abandon his crown early in 1367, successfully securing the support of Edward, the Prince of Wales, for his cause. Their combined Anglo-Castilian force won a crushing victory at Nájera on 3 April 1367 and restored Pedro to his throne, but the ungrateful king, dubbed *the Cruel* by his enemies and known for having once 'reigned in great prosperity',[2] foolishly reneged on his promise to reimburse his English allies. Shortly thereafter, Edward and his men departed from Castile. Within two years, Pedro was overwhelmed and slaughtered by his enemy.

John of Gaunt had also participated in the campaign and within a few years chose to revisit the conflict, taking far greater personal involvement in a dynastic struggle that appeared settled after events at Montiel. Pedro's two daughters, Constance and Isabella, had been under the protection of the English in Aquitaine since their father's assassination, and Gaunt, ever the opportunist, took the former as his second wife in September 1371 near Bordeaux.[3] He promptly laid claim to the Castilian crown and from the outset styled himself King of Castile and León, assuming the royal insignia and forcing his fellow

Englishmen to address him as *Monseigneur d'Espaigne*.[4] His ambition clearly knew no bounds.

However, pressing concerns in England and France kept Gaunt from pursuing his claim to Castile for much of the 1370s, Although he was reaching the peak of his powers by the start of the decade, having become highly influential in the governance of his father's kingdom, the duke's reputation had dwindled among the commons, bitter about relentless taxation and the downturn in English fortunes in the war with France. Exacerbating matters was the declining health of Gaunt's father and brother, removing them from the day-to-day political scene. After his other elder brother Lionel, duke of Clarence, died in Italy in 1368, Gaunt was the sole senior royal active, placing him firmly in the firing line for demoralised, hard-pressed Englishmen seeking a scapegoat for their bleak existence. An astonishing five-hundred-mile *chevaucheé* from Calais to Bordeaux in June 1373 did little to redeem the duke's reputation, particularly as he failed to capture any towns of note while losing significant numbers of troops and horses in the process. His subsequent advocacy for peace with France hardly further endeared Gaunt to the people, and the court party he headed came in for particular criticism during the tempestuous *Good Parliament* in the spring of 1376.

While Gaunt was attempting to defend recent military failures amid accusations of financial impropriety on the part of the Council, on 8 June his forty-five-year-old brother Prince Edward died at Westminster Palace, with his status as heir to the throne assumed by the prince's young son, Richard of Bordeaux. Although Edward's death had been anticipated for some time, his demise was nonetheless greatly mourned by Englishmen, for whom he represented a golden age of military dominance over the continent. Edward had led armies to remarkable victories in Crécy, Poitiers and Nájera, prompting the ecclesiastic chronicler Thomas Walsingham to lament how 'when he died, all the hopes of the English died with him'.[5] Gaunt could hardly hope to compete with such reverence and received none of the adulation reserved for his brother.

Just over a year later, on 21 June 1377, at Sheen Palace, Edward III, 'the flower of this world's knighthood',[6] also succumbed to his own lengthy illness, bringing to an inglorious end a largely successful fifty-year reign. Only Henry III had ruled England for longer, and few people had been alive before Edward's reign. The king's ten-year-old grandson acceded to the throne as Richard II, only the third post-Conquest monarch to be underage upon receipt of the crown. Gaunt, the child's uncle and the most senior living adult in the royal family, was highly visible at the coronation on 16 July, claiming, 'as Earl of Leicester, the office of Steward of England, and as Duke of Lancaster the right of carrying the principal sword of the lord King called Curtana'. As earl of Lincoln, he was even granted the ceremonial role of carving the king's meal.[7] It was a sign of things to come. The duke, although never formally appointed regent, was able to use his considerable influence to guide policy in place of his nephew, establishing his position as the dominant force in English politics over the next four years.

Notwithstanding his marital obligations, military commitments in France, overseeing the country's governance after two royal deaths and dealing with the general political unrest, Gaunt's dalliance with Katherine Swynford carried on unabated after the birth of their first child, John Beaufort. That the duke was now married to Constance of Castile did not seem to be an impediment to their relationship; in fact, if their first child was born in 1372 as has been theorised, then it is probable he was the result of adultery on his father's behalf. The couple's future children were certainly the products of an extramarital affair.

Over a century later, Richard III alluded to the birth timeline of John Beaufort in a proclamation he made against Henry Tudor, the great-great-grandson of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford through their firstborn child. Richard declared in a proclamation first issued on 7 December 1484, and later repeated on 23 June 1485, that his foe had been born of 'double avowtry gotyn'.[8] The suggestion is clear; not only had Gaunt been guilty of adultery, but so too had Katherine – while she was married to Hugh Swynford. The knight died in November

1371, therefore it is plausible that if the child was born before August 1372, nine months later, then Katherine may have committed adultery. Of course, in the absence of John's date of birth, this cannot be proven and remains speculation.

In September 1396, when the duke and Katherine had their marriage ratified by Pope Boniface IX, the papal record noted Gaunt 'had committed adultery with the said Catherine, an unmarried woman, and had offspring by her'.[9] There was no mention of Katherine's marriage to Hugh and it seems unlikely the pair concealed the truth when seeking papal blessing. Richard III's accusation must be treated with caution, for it occurred in anticipation of Henry Tudor's landing and in the midst of an intense propaganda campaign to impugn the reputation of his adversary.

Katerine was, from at least 1 May 1372 when she began to receive regular gifts and payments until the summer of 1381, the chief mistress of the duke of Lancaster. Her close affiliation throughout the decade with Gaunt, which had gradually become apparent to the wider public, earned the Lady of Kettlethorpe a scandalous reputation and a degree of enmity from commons and lords alike. With Constance of Castile mainly based in the Lancastrian fortresses of Tutbury, Hertford and Leicester, Katherine was free to spend a considerable amount of time in the company of the duke, both at her own estates in Lincolnshire and in London at his opulent Savoy Palace. At times it may have appeared uncertain which woman was truly the duchess, although in the autumn of 1372 Constance did give birth to a daughter, ironically named Catherine, otherwise known as Catalina. The birth of a child with his wife was a dynastic necessity for Gaunt, eager to produce an heir in case he did eventually succeed in capturing the Castilian throne, and this had little bearing on his relationship with Katherine Swynford. It was merely royal duty.

If Gaunt's mistress was covetous after this development, however, she was soon reassured of the duke's affection. A string of payments in Gaunt's registry records for 1375 suggest Katherine was again with child. On 24 July, Gaunt commissioned Oliver de Barton, his seneschal

in Nottinghamshire, and Richard de Lancaster, a park warden of his manors of Gringley and Wheatley, to dispatch to his 'beloved dame Katherine Swynford or her attorney, sixty oaks suitable for building' with the intention of providing 'improvement of her houses at Kettlethorpe'. This was supplemented with a payment of 100 marks. In August, the duke ordered two chariots of wood for fuel to be sent to a midwife from Lincoln. Considering the proximity from Lincoln to Kettlethorpe, this last record may indicate payment for services rendered or shortly to come. Another payment of five marks in the form of a life pension to Agnes Bonsergeant, once recorded as Katherine's nurse, adds weight to the idea that in 1375 another child was due.[10]

As with their firstborn, John, the date and circumstance of the birth of the second Beaufort child are unclear. But it probably was Henry who was born that year, based on the dates of the child's later accomplishments. It is plausible young Henry was named for Gaunt's former father-in-law and predecessor as duke of Lancaster, Henry of Grosmont. This may seem unusual considering the child was not descended from the illustrious duke, but Gaunt may nonetheless have wanted to honour the man who served as his mentor and, more importantly, to whom he owed his vast inheritance. Gaunt's legitimate heir, born in 1367 to Blanche, had also been named Henry, so it was clearly a name of significance to the duke.

In 1377, Katherine received further grants from duke and king, including the manors of Gringley, Wheatley, Waddington and Wellingore.[11] Waddington was twelve miles south-east of Kettlethorpe, with Wellingore a further five miles south. Gringley and Wheatley were situated to the north of Lincoln. The grants enhanced Katherine's growing portfolio in Lincolnshire and the increased income may also indicate the arrival of Katherine's third child with Gaunt. Thomas Beaufort is presumed to have been born during 1377 but, as with his elder brothers, details are scant. Like John and Henry, Thomas was also given a name connected to the Lancastrian ducal title; Thomas, 2nd Earl of Lancaster, had been a divisive figure during the reign of Edward II, and despite his execution for treason in 1322,

was regarded as a saint shortly after his death, and certainly during Gaunt's lifetime.

By April 1378, the duke had grown increasingly self-assured about his position, which may have prompted Gaunt to permit Katherine to accompany him in public, a development that brought widespread condemnation from his political opponents. On one notable occasion, Katherine herself was targeted when she was maliciously scolded by the hostile Walsingham as the duke's 'unspeakable concubine', with the duke admonished for 'holding her bridle in public, not only in the presence of his own wife, but even with his people watching on in all the principle towns of the country'.[12] Gaunt, with characteristic arrogance, clearly felt there should be no objection to him spending time with the mother of his children, conveniently overlooking the fact that he was already married to another woman. The duke probably reasoned he wasn't the first nobleman to take a mistress, and a man as mighty as he was not accountable to those lower down the social hierarchy. Accordingly, the duke's records show that for three days in November 1379, he was based at Kettlethorpe Manor, Katherine's home where she was raising the Beaufort brood. John of Gaunt was a man beholden to no one, or so he thought.

This short break in Lincolnshire probably coincided with the birth of the fourth and final Beaufort child. After three boys, Katherine was delivered of the couple's first girl, who they named Joan. This may have been in honour of her father John, with Joan a feminine variant, or perhaps for Joan, dowager princess of Wales and countess of Kent. The countess, known to history as the Fair Maid of Kent, had been married to Gaunt's brother Edward and was the mother of King Richard, baby Joan's first cousin. It is also possible the newborn was named for Joan FitzAlan, dowager countess of Hereford, Essex and Northampton and a niece of Henry of Grosmont. Gaunt was in the process of arranging the marriage of his eldest son and heir, Henry of Bolingbroke, to the countess's daughter, Mary de Bohun, and the name may have been intended as a timely gesture of respect and friendship. The name may even have been inspired by Gaunt's maternal grandmother Joan of Valois, the French mother of Philippa

of Hainault. Whatever the reasons for her name, Joan Beaufort was clearly in esteemed company.

Gaunt continued to bestow money and lands on his mistress after the birth of their fourth child, an act born out of genuine affection for Katherine. On 15 April 1380, she received a payment of £100 for her services as governess to the duke's daughters, a role she now presumably fulfilled to keep her close to her lover, while on 20 January 1381, Katherine was granted the wardship of the lands, tenements and heir of the recently deceased Elys de Thoresby. Only two months later, she received a considerable array of gifts from Gaunt, which included two tables of silver and enamel worth seven marks, a silver belt and a silver *chaufour*, or portable cooking dish.[13] There were other treasures obtained for Katherine on occasion, including a diamond-encrusted gold brooch, but these were delivered directly into the duke's hands and considered personal in nature.

The duke may have appeared, and indeed felt, completely secure in his position, but as the 1380s began, his enemies at court were plotting his downfall, as were the commons of London, and beyond. His extramarital relationship had been heavily criticised, with unrelenting attacks on his reputation triggering an untenable situation. The tense atmosphere finally gave way to unbridled rage in the summer of 1381 as violent uprisings erupted throughout the south-east; each event was united in a common cause to irrevocably destroy the authority of the hated duke, the figurehead for an unpopular regime. Although the extenuating factors that prompted the Peasants' Revolt are varied and complex, the spark that ignited widespread social disorder can be traced to the announcement of a third poll tax to raise much-needed funds to sustain the ongoing wars in France. After it emerged there was large-scale avoidance of payment in March 1381, royal commissioners were appointed by the Council to forcibly collect the monies, misjudging the mood of the disaffected populace. The arrival of one such official in Essex provoked a violent response from the locals, anger that soon spread throughout the region. By 7 June, the rebels had declared a shadowy figure named Wat Tyler as their leader and proceeded to march on

London, ominously armed with swords and axes. This was not merely a disorganised rabble causing indiscriminate vandalism, but a disciplined force utilising experience gained from the wars in France.

The king wisely retreated into the Tower of London while the rebels cut and pillaged their way through the capital, causing significant damage to both life and property. On the morning of 14 June, a group of the protestors captured the Tower while the king was meeting some of the rebels at Mile End, seizing, and then callously beheading, the 'wise and worthy' archbishop of Canterbury, Simon Sudbury, who also served as Lord Chancellor.[14]

The chief target of the uprising, however, was John of Gaunt, who the rebels held responsible not only for England's recent failures in the French war but also for the crippling taxes that funded such unacceptable defeats. While the duke was away from London at the time of the revolt, and sensibly retreated into Scotland once informed of events, those close to him were caught up in the shocking violence. Gaunt's physician, the Franciscan friar William Appleton, was beheaded at the Tower alongside Sudbury, while Gaunt's fourteen-year-old heir, Henry of Bolingbroke, also appeared destined for the chopping block – until a brave guard persuaded the mob otherwise. His father's cherished palace at Savoy, however, the 'fairest in the kingdom',[15] did not escape as lightly as his beloved son.

Savoy Palace's origins date back to 1246 when Henry III granted the land to his wife Eleanor of Provence's uncle Peter, Count of Savoy, who erected a fine house on the site. The property was subsequently purchased by Queen Eleanor after her uncle's death and bestowed upon her son Edmund, 1st Earl of Lancaster. Savoy eventually came into Gaunt's possession around 1362 through his marriage to Blanche of Lancaster, by which time it was unrivalled in England for its sprawling grandeur, a vast array of chambers, halls, stables and gardens stretching from the Strand down to the banks of the Thames. It was considered sufficient to house the captive king of France, John II, between 1357 and 1360 and again for a spell four years later, during which time he died within the confines of the palace. Gaunt

devoted a substantial amount of time and money on extending and refurbishing Savoy, and gradually considered it his primary residence, with only Kenilworth Castle in Warwickshire able to compete for his affections.

Due to Gaunt's strong personal association with Savoy, and its status as the most recognisable example of the duke's incomparable fortune, the rebels wrought utter destruction on the property, barely pausing in their frenzied attack until only rubble remained. Gaunt's tapestries and garments were shredded and all his gold and silver plate was crushed with hammers before it was nonchalantly disposed of in the Thames. Several of the rebels even used one of his jewel-encrusted jackets for target practice with their arrows, a dramatic demonstration of their loathing of Gaunt.

Once the rebels' merciless rampage had been exhausted, the palace was burnt to the ground, using gunpowder barrels found in the cellars. Gaunt was distraught when informed of the devastation but he never rebuilt his beloved Savoy, possibly depriving the Beauforts of an inherited interest in the palace. The site remained undeveloped until 1509 when the duke's Beaufort descendant, Henry VII, in his 'great pitie and compassion' for the 'pouer nedie people', bequeathed a sizable sum of 10,000 marks in his will to 'erecte, buylde and establishe a commune Hospital in our place called the Savoie'.[16]

The Peasants' Revolt started to subside on 15 June when the undaunted young king met with the ringleaders at Smithfield, just outside the town walls. After a heated discussion with Wat Tyler, William Walworth, mayor of London, impatiently interceded and, in unclear circumstances, the rebel was stabbed. Tyler was pulled from his horse and swiftly put to death before his 'head was deftly struck off', while the emboldened royal forces attacked the remainder of the rebels. Leaderless and overwhelmed, they gradually dispersed, and 'pitifully crept home'.[17] Although the revolt reached an ignominious end, the rebels had caused significant damage to the city and their actions had shaken the establishment to its very core, none more so than John of Gaunt.

For Katherine Swynford, the Peasants' Revolt was a terrifying series of events in which she had been vulnerable to attack, particularly once her protector had absconded to Scotland. By the summer of 1381 she had four young children with the duke of Lancaster, and their contentious relationship had formed a significant part of the rebels' issue with Gaunt, whom they chastised for being weak and blinded by desire. The duke had, incredibly, emerged from the revolt physically unscathed; but the same could not be said for his reputation or his relationship with Katherine, which, just like the Savoy, lay in ruins.

It had become abundantly clear to the duke that his extramarital activities would no longer be tolerated, so Gaunt was prepared to acquiesce to prevailing opinion and coldly resolved to 'remove that lady from his household'.[18] By the end of the year, they had parted ways as lovers. No further Beaufort children were conceived by the couple, suggesting that although they may have remained in contact, the sexual aspect of the affair had been brought to a premature end. Katherine was only around thirty years old at the time of the revolt and was presumably still capable of bearing children.

On 14 February 1382 a deed was issued by Gaunt whereby he let it be known that he 'remorsed, released and entirely from ourselves and our heirs quitclaimed the Lady Katherine de Swynford'. He clarified that no one acting in his name could 'demand or be able to vindicate any claim or right concerning the aforementioned Lady Katherine, her heirs or her executors'.[19] The document was a public promise by the duke not to pursue any claim to property or gifts he had given Katherine, even if legally entitled to do so.

The quitclaim was a commendable action on Gaunt's behalf, intended to protect and provide for his former mistress and the children they had produced together. It was also prudent, for the duke was planning to embark on a campaign to claim the throne of Castile and, in the event of his death, he intended his second family to be financially secure. The document had a further, more public purpose, however; John of Gaunt was advising his many detractors that the

scandalous affair was categorically over.

3

The Want of Birthright
1382–1397

By the end of the Peasants' Revolt, John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford had been romantically involved for approximately a decade, their illicit liaison producing four healthy children collectively known as the Beauforts. The couple's affair had prospered throughout a tumultuous period in England, which included the deaths of Edward III and his namesake heir, the unrelenting financial burden incurred by devastating losses in France, and the terrifying uprising led by Wat Tyler. By the summer of 1381, Gaunt was the most reviled person in the kingdom, a divisive figure of hate desperately struggling to retain the favour of the young king in the face of unbearable hostility. For Katherine, humiliatingly renounced by her lover, the only option was to retreat to Lincoln to care for her six children, two Swynford and four Beaufort, in relative anonymity.

While political necessity forced Gaunt into terminating his extramarital affair, the repentant duke nonetheless strove to take adequate financial care of his discarded mistress and their young children. On 7 September 1381, Gaunt granted Katherine a generous lifetime annuity of 200 marks for 'her good services to his daughters',[1] a considerable sum that enabled her to take out a lease on the Chancery near Lincoln Cathedral. The Chancery had been the official residence of the cathedral's chancellors since 1321 and provided a comfortable base for her children, secure among the clergy and away from any townspeople harbouring resentment of her purported licentious behaviour.

Katherine remained the leaseholder until at least 1393, and possibly as late as 1396, when the cathedral's chancellor John

Huntman assumed possession and she returned to the duke's side. It's tempting to suggest the duke, a long-time benefactor of the cathedral, used his influence with the clergy for Katherine's benefit, particularly considering it was in the interests of his own flesh and blood to have a safe home.

She didn't neglect Kettlethorpe Manor, however. In October 1383, Katherine used some of her recently acquired fortune to make improvements to the premises, receiving permission from the king to enclose three hundred acres of land and woods and increase her profits as the sole beneficiary of the harvest on her lands.[2]

Such progress was tempered, however, by sporadic acts of violence on her property. In August 1384, Katherine's house at Grantham was burgled by a group of local politicians and merchants, who assaulted several of her servants in the process, while a month later the same men were again censured for breaking into her property, this time in Lincoln, worryingly close to where she was raising the Beaufort children.[3] Was Katherine targeted because of her wealth, or her lingering association with the unpopular duke? It could not have been an easy time for her, or the children, by then aged between five and twelve years old and presumably aware something was amiss.

Fortunately for Katherine, by 1386 she was on noticeably closer terms with Gaunt once more, when the duke ordered the part-payment of a 500-mark loan she had lent him 'in his great necessity',[4] probably associated with his costly invasion of Castile that year. On 19 February, meanwhile, Henry Bolingbroke, earl of Derby and the duke's treasured heir, was admitted to Lincoln Cathedral's Confraternity, an order Gaunt himself had been inducted into when he was three years old. Derby was not inducted alone; he was accompanied by his young half-brother John Beaufort, around thirteen years old, and the latter's own half-brother Thomas Swynford. For Katherine to witness two of her sons admitted into the cathedral's honoured society alongside the Lancastrian heir must have been a precious moment, not to mention an exciting occasion for young John, centre of attention for the first time in his life.

It was also during 1386 that Katherine, probably accompanied by her young daughter Joan Beaufort, started to reside in the household of Mary de Bohun, Derby's countess. The Bohuns, much like the Lancastrians, were noted collectors of manuscripts and books and were strong advocates of the arts. All Mary's children with Derby would grow into confident and cultured individuals, reflecting the intellectual upbringing of both their parents, and it may have been expected Joan would perhaps learn some of the values and etiquette expected from the daughter of a senior nobleman.

Placement within her sister-in-law's household may also have been to prepare the seven-year-old for marriage, for early in the year Joan's father had betrothed his only Beaufort daughter to Robert Ferrers, the ten-year-old son of Sir Robert 1st Baron Ferrers of Wem and Elizabeth, 4th Baroness Boteler. The elder Ferrers had died in 1380, with the younger Robert inheriting his father's baronetcy with the title Baron Boteler of Wem in right of his mother. The Ferrers were an established gentry family based in Shropshire and Staffordshire, and had fought for the duke of Lancaster in the French wars.[5] It was a solid, if unspectacular, engagement for Joan, with the marriage eventually taking place in 1392, shortly after Robert's sixteenth birthday. On account of her illegitimate status, Joan was restricted from bringing any lands or titles to the marriage, and was therefore not an attractive marital prospect for any bachelors further up the social ladder seeking an estate by right of their wife. For a family in the Ferrers' position, however, a connection with the Lancastrians was sufficient reason to pursue the match.

Contact with the duke was limited, however, as Gaunt finally prepared to depart from England to press his claim to the Castilian throne, fifteen years into his second marriage. His relationship with King Richard had become strained in recent years, exacerbated by a hostile court faction determined to oust the influential duke from his authoritative position. In a transparent tactic to remove Gaunt from the apex of English politics, in November 1385 he was granted permission by parliament to launch his long-overdue invasion of Castile, embarking with his army on 8 July 1386.[6]

The enterprise proved to be frustrating. By July 1387, after a protracted campaign that eventually floundered under the scorching sun, Gaunt sought peace with King Juan, son and heir of Enrique of Trastámara. Gaunt's army had fallen into disarray, with men perishing due to bouts of sickness and plague, depriving England of 'the flower of its youthful chivalry'.[7] Although the terms of the treaty between Gaunt and his adversary forced the duke to renounce his claim to Castile, the shrewd negotiator not only secured a generous payment of £100,000 but also a vast sum of gold. It allegedly took forty-seven mules to carry his treasure back to England. Crucially for his dynastic ambitions, Gaunt also arranged the betrothal of his tall, fair daughter Catalina to Juan's heir, Enrique of Asturias. The arrangement with the Castilians came less than five months after Gaunt had secured the marriage of his eldest daughter Philippa to King João of Portugal. Through these two half-sisters, the duke's descendants would eventually inherit the thrones of both Portugal and Spain.

While the duke had been campaigning on the Iberian Peninsula, in his absence England had descended into political turmoil. The king's continuing favouritism of a court faction headed by Robert de Vere, 9th Earl of Oxford, provoked a group of alienated nobles to instigate an armed attack on those they alleged were leading the king astray. Known as the Lords Appellant, this band of brothers included some of the foremost noblemen in the land, lending credence to their revolt, and comprised Edward III's youngest son Thomas, duke of Gloucester; the earls of Arundel, Warwick and Nottingham; and young Henry of Bolingbroke, earl of Derby. The lords, sensing negotiation with the obstinate king was a futile exercise, routed de Vere in a skirmish on 20 December 1387 at Radcot Bridge, Oxfordshire, and seized *de facto* control of the kingdom.[8]

Parliamentary proceedings between February and June 1388 consolidated the position of the Lords Appellant, and resulted in the revocation of any tangible authority the king had hitherto possessed. During the Merciless Parliament, Richard's support base was decimated. The Lord Chief Justice Robert Tresilian, the Lord Mayor of London Nicholas Brembre and Sir Simon Burley, all close companions

to the king, were executed, adjudged by Adam of Usk as having 'wrongfully fostered the king's unruliness',[9] while de Vere, the prime target, escaped abroad where he died in 1392. Alexander Neville, archbishop of York, and Michael de la Pole, earl of Suffolk, also fled England. It was the second outbreak of unrestrained violence, replete with extrajudicial executions, in only six years, and it was in this tense climate that John of Gaunt was summoned back to England by a king in desperate need of his uncle's learned council and commanding presence.

The Appellants' authority weakened somewhat when the twenty-two-year-old king wilfully declared he had reached the age of maturity in May 1389 and no longer required the council of others to rule, particularly the five lords. Even so, it was clear to a king even as imperious as Richard that he required a man of Gaunt's stature to alleviate lingering tensions around his court. The duke landed at Plymouth in November 1389 and was warmly received by his nephew, who resorted to wearing his uncle's 'SS' livery collar, its S-shaped links an icon of the Lancasters.

By March 1390, Gaunt was reinstated to the Council while on 1 August he arranged a hunt at Leicester for the 'great men of the realm',[10] a concerted attempt to restore peaceful relations among the upper echelons of English society. The king and queen were present, as well as the dukes of York and Gloucester, the earls of Arundel and Huntingdon, and many other lesser lords. One wonders whether the young Beauforts were also invited by their father, perhaps an ideal occasion to introduce the youngsters to members of the court. They could not remain obscure indefinitely.

With Gaunt back on conciliatory terms with the king, the duke felt confident enough to resume relations with Katherine Swynford, confirmed by an entry in the Duchy of Lancaster accounts for May 1391 to May 1392, which records a gift of 'one diamond in a gold ring to dne. K. Swynford'. As the crown of Castile was no longer a viable option for Gaunt, the façade of a happy and committed marriage to Constance unravelled, and the duke's attention returned to Katherine

and their Beaufort offspring. The Duchy account also records that Joan Beaufort, mistakenly transcribed as Jane Beauford, was given a pair of *'paternosters de coral'*, a valuable set of red rosary prayer beads and possibly a sign of a devout personality.[11] A further indication of the duke's renewed regard for his second family is evident in the Household Attendance Roll for November 1391, which records Katherine receiving payments of 12*d* a day, with 6*d* a day reserved for each of their children.[12]

As the Beauforts approached adulthood, Gaunt had to consider how to provide for the foursome without reducing his legitimate heir's vast Lancastrian inheritance. The eldest, John Beaufort, was prepared for a military career and, through his father's influence, was named among thirty English knights who travelled to France at the end of March 1390 to partake in a friendly jousting tournament at Saint-Inglevert, just outside Calais.[13] His two half-brothers, Thomas Swnyford on his mother's side and Henry, earl of Derby on his father's, were also present, having accepted a challenge to a trial of arms from a group of French lords. The expedition surely fostered a camaraderie between the three that endured throughout the remainder of their lives.

The challenge was issued by three renowned French jousters, led by Jean le Maingre, better known as Boucicaut. After three days of bountiful feasting amid raucous celebrations, the tournament commenced and the English contingent, although producing an honourable performance, proved no match for the undefeated Frenchmen. More than a hundred knights from around the continent entered the lists and it must have been a stimulating environment for John to immerse himself in, taking the opportunity to pick up invaluable advice from Europe's most experienced martial combatants. The teenager's performance in the tournament did not go unnoticed either, and he was handpicked to accompany Boucicaut on an upcoming expedition known as the Barbary Crusade. Once the festivities had concluded and the various parties dispersed back to their homelands, the young Englishman journeyed on to Mahdiya on the North African coast as part of a Franco-Genoese force led by Louis

II, Duke of Bourbon, which intended to wage war on Muslim pirates operating in the Mediterranean.[14]

The siege of Mahdiya lasted over two months, although lack of provisions, poor knowledge of the local terrain, and malfunctioning equipment brought the campaign to an anticlimactic conclusion, eventually resolved through a series of treaties. It is unclear how long John was involved in the siege, or what his participation amounted to, but the experience he gained from the quasi-crusade in an unfamiliar, hostile environment only served to stand him in good stead for future campaigns. On his return to England, he was rewarded with the manors of Overstone, Maxey, Eydon and a partial share of Brampton Parva, which cumulatively brought in a steady income of £88 a year.[15]

On 7 June 1392, Richard II appointed John one of his household knights, 'retained to stay the king for life', for which he would be remunerated with a wage of 100 marks a year.[16] This allowance was bolstered by a payment of £100 from his father, a generous endowment to help fund the youngster's lifestyle. John also started to exercise his growing influence by securing a pardon on 28 October 1392 for one of his tenants, John Cros of Overston, charged with 'killing John Logowe there in self-defence'.[17]

Two years later, John strengthened his growing military reputation by participating in another crusade, this time in Lithuania and Hungary, alongside the Teutonic Knights. The eldest Beaufort had clearly inherited the Lancastrian penchant for crusading and sought martial glory in far-flung lands against strange peoples with alien cultures. At the same time, he was shown further favour by his royal cousin, for on 20 September 1394 he was granted the manors of Curry Rivel, Langport and Martock in Somerset, with the proviso he would only take possession of the lands once the current holder William Montague, 2nd Earl of Salisbury, had died.[18]. The elderly earl had no heirs and the manors duly transferred to John three years later, after Salisbury's death.

In the middle of the decade, possibly as early as 1394, John was

betrothed to Margaret Holland, the daughter of Thomas Holland, 2nd Earl of Kent and elder half-brother of the king. Kent was well acquainted with Gaunt, having fought alongside the duke in Castile, a connection that may have abetted the Beaufort-Holland union. As Margaret was still a minor, the marriage was not immediately consummated and the couple's first child would only follow around 1400 once she reached a more acceptable child-bearing age. Marriage to one of England's most sought-after royal brides, a niece of the king, was a significant coup for young John Beaufort, and when combined with his recent manorial grants and military exploits, represented a satisfactory introduction into aristocratic society.

John's younger brother Henry was primed for a career in the Church, a traditional livelihood for the younger sons of a nobleman and an astute tactic in gaining his family future advantage in ecclesiastical matters. Henry entered Peterhouse College in Cambridge around 1388, before progressing to Queen's College, Oxford, to further his religious studies.[19] Henry was surely informed on his arrival that the queen who inspired the name of the college was none other than his esteemed grandmother, Philippa of Hainault. While based at Queen's, Henry received, by royal grant, the prebend of nearby Thame, as well as Riccall in Yorkshire. These were augmented by the wardenship of the free chapel at Tickhill, providing Henry with a steady source of income from the Church to supplement his studies. In 1391 he also received the prebend of Sutton and Buckingham,[20] which added to his earnings. Henry's progress did not go unnoticed; in 1392 a record in the college accounts contains a brief reference to the procurement of 'wine for the Lord Duke of Lancaster', indicating Gaunt had paid a visit, perhaps one of many, to check up on his son.[21]

The marriage of Joan Beaufort to Sir Robert Ferrers also took place early in the decade, probably in 1392 or 1393, and she fell pregnant with their first child shortly afterwards. If Joan, or Lady Ferrers as she was now known, was born in 1379 as seems likely, then she was only around fourteen years old at the time, which, although young, was nonetheless two years older than the widely observed age of consent. The Ferrers' child was christened Elizabeth, presumably in honour of

her grandmother, Baroness Boteler. A second daughter soon followed and was named Mary. The girls were the first mutual grandchildren of Katherine Swynford and John of Gaunt.

The fortunes of the Beauforts received a significant boost in March 1394 when Constance, Gaunt's duchess, died at Leicester Castle. She was buried in July before the altar of St Mary de Castro church and it seems likely that at least some of the Beauforts were present for the solemn proceedings because the funeral of their sister-in-law Mary de Bohun also took place the following day. It may have been a difficult few days for the duke, and in particular his distraught son Derby, but the duchess's death would prove beneficial for the aspirations of the Beauforts.

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The Castilian marriage had been a union of political convenience for John of Gaunt, and consequently Constance spent most of their marriage away from his activities, spending her time discreetly at some of the duke's lesser-visited properties. As a princess brought up around a royal court, she conducted herself at all times with a regal dignity that earned her the respect of fellow courtiers, not unlike the behaviour later exhibited by her descendant Katherine of Aragon. Although the marriage did not bring Gaunt the crown he craved, it did produce a daughter who became queen consort of Castile in 1390, and a grandson Juan who acceded to the throne in 1406. His descendants still occupy the throne of Spain today, so dynastically the twenty-two-year marriage was unquestionably successful, if not noticeably affectionate.

Of course, the fifty-four-year-old duke was now free to marry again, and after two political marriages, his ambition for further inheritance through wedlock appears to have receded. His third marriage, two years later, would be for personal reasons, and the woman he took as his bride was Katherine Swynford, the faithful mother of four of his eight children and the woman he had unceremoniously rejected fifteen years earlier. It was a remarkable

decision; it was almost unheard of during the fourteenth century for a nobleman of his stature to marry his mistress.

The wedding took place on 14 January 1396 in Lincoln Cathedral,[22] a venue intimately connected with both bride and groom, and with two spire-topped towers dominating the skyline it was among the finest in all England, if not Europe. Although the spires eventually collapsed in 1549, the cathedral had lost none of its grandeur by the nineteenth century, when Victorian art critic John Ruskin mused that Lincoln was 'worth all the English cathedrals I have seen put together' and the 'most precious piece of architecture in the British Islands'.[23] It was certainly a splendid setting to host the ceremony that represented the spiritual rebirth of the Beaufort dynasty.

It was inevitable the wedding would incur scathing criticism once it became widely known; Thomas Walsingham cynically noted in his chronicle that the union occurred 'to the amazement of all at such a miraculous happening, for she had a very small fortune', before scornfully adding that 'such was the magnitude of his error',[24] while Froissart believed the wedding had 'caused much astonishment in France and England as she was of humble birth'.[25] This was slightly unfair; disregarding Gaunt's incomparable wealth and obvious lack of need for further enrichment, it's clear Katherine was an amiable lady with a charming nature that appealed to the duke. She had retained his affections in the face of enforced separation, public vilification, social ostracism and violent uprisings. Gaunt didn't marry Katherine Swnyford out of gratitude or duty, he married her precisely because that was what he wanted to do. As the king's first wife Anne of Bohemia had died in June 1394, and Richard had yet to remarry, by order of precedence Katherine instantly became the highest-ranking lady in the realm, much to the consternation of those she displaced. It was an astonishing turn of events that capped an improbable rise after the nadir that was the Peasants' Revolt in 1381.

With their parents now married, focus naturally turned to the Beaufort children and the process of their legitimisation. In 1396,

John was around twenty-four years old while Joan, the youngest of his siblings, was roughly seventeen. Despite their maturity, and modest accomplishments in the case of the two elder Beauforts, removing the stain of their illegitimate origins was foremost in Gaunt's mind. The reasoning was clear; the duke only had one legitimate male heir, Henry of Bolingbroke, and it was prudent to solidify the family unit around the earl of Derby. The Beauforts would be of far greater use to the House of Lancaster if they were not hindered by any legal barriers resulting from their birth out of wedlock.

During the fourteenth century a bastard could not legally inherit any estates or titles, which often led to illegitimate children of landowners and noblemen relying on the good favour and creative fiscal management of their fathers. Providing he could afford to do so, a father often purchased manors to confer upon his bastards, an effective method already exploited by Gaunt in John Beaufort's case. Of course, such generosity only worked while the benefactor lived. An illegitimate child was also barred from obtaining any preferment in the Church, a restriction which may have concerned Gaunt considering Henry Beaufort's intended ecclesiastical career.

To establish retrospective legitimacy, the petitioner had to appeal to both parliament and the Church to satisfy common and church law respectively. The common law stipulated that any child born out of wedlock remained barred from legitimisation in the event their parents subsequently married, as was the case with Gaunt and Katherine Swynford, while the surprisingly more accommodating law of the church preached the opposite. The duke duly applied to the pope in Rome and parliament in Westminster to seek charters of legitimacy on behalf of the Beauforts, intending to satisfy both courts of law. Papal Letters dated September 1396 disclosed that a petitioner had been dispatched to the Holy See to seek such dispensation from Boniface IX. The entry in the *Papal Register* for that month recorded the

ratification and confirmation of the marriage contracted by

> John, duke of Lancaster, and Catherine de Swynforde, damsel, of the diocese of Lincoln, with dispensation to remain therein, offspring past and future being declared legitimate. Their petition contained that formerly, after the death of his wife Constance, duke John and Catherine contracted and consummated marriage (not being ignorant that John had been godfather to a daughter of Catherine by another husband, and that afterwards, while Constance was still alive, he had committed adultery with the said Catherine, an unmarried woman, and had offspring by her); and that they considered such marriage to be lawful, inasmuch as, the said impediment of compaternity not being notorious but private.[26].

It is important to note that although Gaunt admitted to adultery while married to Constance, there is no suggestion of extramarital discretions on Katherine's part while married to Hugh Swynford. This adds further credence to the idea their affair commenced after November 1371, when Sir Hugh died in France. It seems unlikely either party was willing to propagate falsehoods when dealing with the Holy See. The entry in the register confirms the pope freely provided dispensation for the marriage, with any past or future offspring deemed legitimate. The entry further noted that the petitioner who travelled to Rome on behalf of Gaunt was handed 'a letter of credence marked by the pope's hand, and related to them that, as was also contained in the letter itself, the pope had given his consent'. Put simply, in the eyes of the Church, the Beauforts were legitimate.

In January 1397, parliament assembled in Westminster, during the proceedings of which 'the duke of Lancaster had a child legitimised whom he had conceived with Katherine Swynford'.[27] Edmund Stafford, bishop of Exeter and Lord Chancellor, addressed the members and declared on behalf of the king that the pope had 'enabled and legitimised Sir John de Beauford, his brothers and his sister', before reading the royal charter which confirmed that

> Richard by the grace of God, King of England and France, and Lord of Ireland, to our most dear cousins the noble men, John the Knight, Henry the Clerk, Thomas Domicello, and to our beloved the noble woman Joan Beauford Domicelle, the most dear relatives of our uncle the noble John, Duke of Lancaster, born our lieges, greeting, and the favour of our royal majesty. While internally considering how incessantly and with what honours we are graced by the very useful and sincere affection of our aforesaid uncle, and by the wisdom of his counsel, we think it proper and fit that, for the sake of his merits, and in contemplation of his favours, we should enrich you (who are endowed by nature with great probity and honesty of life and behaviour, and are begotten of royal blood, and by the divine gift are adorned with many virtues) with the strength of our royal prerogative of favour and grace.

This first part of the charter concerned itself with the moral qualities and exemplary behaviour of the foursome, providing some rare insight into the character of the Beauforts at this stage of their lives. If King Richard had been responsible for the text in the charter, then he obviously deemed his cousins to be worthy recipients of his favour. The second part of the document focused on the specific consequences of legitimisation, clearly stipulating the Beauforts were now entitled to acquire any estate, attain any office, or inherit any title as though they had been born in lawful matrimony:

> Hence it is, that, yielding to the entreaties of our said uncle your father, we do, in the fullness of our royal power and by the assent of parliament, by the tenor of these presents empower you, who as it is asserted suffer from the want of birthright, (notwithstanding such defect, which, and the qualities thereof, we take to be in these presents sufficiently expressed) to be raised, promoted, elected, assume, and be admitted to all honours, dignities, pre-eminences, estates, degrees and offices public and private whatsoever, as well

perpetual as temporal, and feudal and noble, by whatsoever names they may be designated, whether they be Duchies, Principalities, Earldoms, Baronies or other fees, and whether they depend or are holden of us mediately or immediately, and to receive, retain, bear, and exercise the same as freely and lawfully as if ye were born in lawful matrimony, and you and every of you do restore and legitimise: any statutes or customs of our realm of England to the contrary thereof made or observed (which we consider to be herein expressed) in anywise notwithstanding.[28]

From the moment parliament dissolved on 12 February 1397, John of Gaunt had established, as far as ecclesiastical or civil law would allow, the legitimacy of his Beaufort offspring. No person in England could invalidate, contradict or dispute the judgement of pope or parliament. The Beauforts were to be henceforth regarded as fully fledged members of the English royal family. It was a status they were determined to be put to good use.

4

The Marquis, the Bishop and the Countess 1397–1399

As formally recognised members of the royal family, confirmed by both canon and common law, the Beauforts had been freed from the shackles of illegitimacy. No longer were the destinies of the foursome reliant on the favour of their ageing father; they were now permitted to obtain titles, offices and property in their own right. Crucially, they were also entitled to pass on their acquisitions to any future offspring. The act of legitimacy truly represented the moment the Beauforts arrived on the English political scene as a force to be reckoned with.

On 10 February 1397, the very day after the Act was passed, John Beaufort was created earl of Somerset in a glittering ceremony in which the king personally invested his cousin by 'girding on the sword',[1] the intimate process of fastening a new earl's belt to his person. The king also assumed responsibility for draping a velvet cloak across John's shoulders, signifying the earl's new power was derived wholly from his sovereign and no other authority. The earldom of Somerset had only been created once before in England, and even then its use had been disputed. In 1141 William de Mohun of Dunster was elevated by Empress Matilda for his assistance during her war with Stephen of Blois over the English crown, but after the latter emerged from the conflict the victor, de Mohun's title went unrecognised. It was not revived again until 1397.

As 1st Earl of Somerset, John was summoned to parliament and accorded a social status on par with his fellow earls and above any other man in the kingdom save for the king and his dukes. His standing was further enhanced when he was inducted into the Order of the Garter, the most prestigious order of chivalry in England and

founded by Somerset's grandfather Edward III in 1348. Although the order offered no material benefit, it was intended to honour the 'bravest and noblest in England',[2] and demanded loyalty, courage and a proficiency in arms from its members. A position had become vacant in September 1396 after the death of John Beaumont, 4th Baron Beaumont,[3] and once Somerset was elected to take his place, he was permitted to hang his sword, helm and banner in St George's Chapel at Windsor alongside those of his companions in the brotherhood.

As the first Beaufort peer of the realm, Somerset elected to update his coat of arms. Until the parliament of 1397, John's arms were derived from those of the House of Lancaster, albeit sufficiently altered to reflect his bastardy. They consisted of a blue and white shield differenced by a *bend sinister gules*, a diagonal top-left-to-bottom-right red strap. The *bend* was adorned with the three lions of England and decorated with a blue label of three points, displaying multiple golden *fleurs-de-lis*. This oblique strip was a distinction often added to coats of arms to signify that the bearer was illegitimate, a modification easily recognisable to members of medieval nobility. Somerset's new arms encompassed the quartered arms of France and England within a *bordure compony argent and azure,* or segmented border of Lancastrian blue and white. The Beauforts were now entitled to use the Royal Arms as legitimated descendants of Edward III, and both Henry and Thomas Beaufort would follow their elder brother's lead, although the latter would use a blue and ermine border.[4]

John was not the only one of his brothers advancing in society. Henry Beaufort, sent to Oxford by his father to 'make a great jurist of him',[5] was freed by his legitimisation to seek an ecclesiastical appointment, although he may have been hasty in obtaining his first appointment from the pope without the necessary approval of the king, breaching the Statute of Provisors. Henry was fortunate, for on 20 December 1396 he was pardoned of any offence by his cousin Richard, and eventually assumed the office as dean of Wells on 5 January 1397 without further censure.[6] It wouldn't be the last time Henry would fall foul of kings of England for obtaining ecclesiastic appointments without consulting his monarch.

In any event, it seems unlikely Henry physically took up his role in Somerset as by April, when he was ordained a deacon in Fulham Palace, he was also serving as Chancellor of the University of Oxford.[7] The office of chancellor was an elected position; members of the university put forward one of their own to represent the institution in political and legal matters. It is unclear if Henry's acquisition of the post was due to his emerging tenacity and assiduousness or whether the precocious son of a duke had been selected due to his advantageous royal connections, but either way it was a noteworthy appointment enabling the young man to showcase his talents.

The third Beaufort brother, Thomas, was around twenty years old in 1397, and on 6 July was appointed one of the king's knights for life, for which he was paid an annuity of 100 marks.[8] In November, he was betrothed to the fourteen-year-old Margaret Neville, a daughter of the deceased Sir Thomas Neville of Hornby in Lancashire. As heiress of her grandfather Sir Robert, it was anticipated the Neville estate and lordship of Hornby would shortly be inherited by Thomas Beaufort in right of his wife, providing him with a steady source of income. As it transpired, Sir Robert survived until 1413, by which time his son-in-law was a well-established member of the nobility with little requirement of a minor northern castle.[9]

Joan Beaufort also benefitted from her legitimisation. After her husband Robert Ferrers passed away early in 1396, Joan was left with two young daughters to raise, not unlike her mother's situation after the premature death of Hugh Swynford in 1371. Fortunately for Joan, the papal dispensation bestowing legitimacy upon the Beauforts had considerably enhanced her marital prospects and, with her father keen to secure another politically expedient union, she was betrothed to Sir Ralph Neville, 4th Baron Neville de Raby, in November 1396. Her new husband was a lord of rising influence in northern England and in his early thirties at the time of the marriage, the baron's second. Neville had already had two sons and six daughters with his first wife, Margaret Stafford. However, as time would tell, Joan's relationship with her stepchildren would prove far from amicable.

The Nevilles were principally based at Raby Castle, near Staindrop in County Durham, although they had other residences at Middleham, Sheriff Hutton and Brancepeth. Raby was a palatial fortress rebuilt by Ralph's father John Neville between 1378 and 1388 and regarded as one of the grandest homes in the north. The castle had been rebuilt on the site of a pre-Norman manor house, gradually evolving into the splendid complex that greeted Joan upon her arrival. After passing through the outer gatehouse and over the drawbridge, the young baroness was greeted by the inner gateway with its sixty-two-foot-high obliquely placed flanking towers, an indication of the growing affluence of her husband's family. Now that she was a Neville herself, such wealth was also hers to savour, as were the sprawling deer park that surrounded Raby, the private chapel for her religious needs and the stately Great Hall. She also became acquainted with the recently erected south-west tower, later to be known as the Beaufort Tower to highlight its connection with its former inhabitant. Once settled into her role as a wealthy baron's wife, Joan focused on producing several more children to strengthen the burgeoning Beaufort-Neville alliance. Ironically, it would be the descendants of this union that would ultimately destroy the Beauforts as a force some seventy years later.

As summer of 1397 approached, the kingdom was teetering on the edge of yet another crisis. King Richard, now aged thirty, had grown confident of his position in recent years and had shaken off the restraints he felt were imposed on him in his younger days. Beholden to nobody, the king grew increasingly authoritarian, seeking to 'impoverish the commons and to borrow large sums of money from anybody he could', until soon there was not a single man of substance 'able to escape loaning money to the king'.[10] Despite appearances to the contrary, it also became evident that Richard had not forgotten, nor forgiven, the actions of the Lords Appellant a decade earlier.

On 10 July 1397, the king suddenly ordered the arrests of his uncle Thomas, duke of Gloucester, and the earls of Arundel and Warwick, three of the lords who had previously rebelled against their sovereign. The noble triumvirate were accused of 'grevious wrongs' and 'traitorously usurping the legal authority' of the king's royalty[11] and

Richard was determined to destroy all three. That is precisely what happened. Arundel was tried and executed on 21 September, and although the elderly earl of Warwick kept his head, he was forced to forfeit his lands and titles and suffer the indignity of banishment to the Isle of Man. The highest-ranking victim of the king was his uncle, Gloucester. It may have been expected that the duke's brothers John of Gaunt and Edmund of Langley would intercede on his behalf, but both men had their own prospects to consider and chose to distance themselves from their doomed sibling. Gaunt, in particular, had concerns the king's fury would turn towards the Lancastrians, especially as his son Derby had been one of the Appellants yet to be targeted. Gaunt therefore acquiesced in the king's actions, even pronouncing the guilty verdict at Arundel's trial in his capacity as Lord High Steward. He had little choice if he wanted to keep the king's attentions away from Derby and, by kinship, the Beauforts.

John Beaufort had been present at the trials where, as an earl, he was attired in 'red robes of silk, banded with the while silk and powdered with letters of gold'.[12] Intriguingly, he was also named as one of the leading figures who had called for Gloucester's arrest, accusing him of 'treason against the estate, crown and dignity of the king'.[13] There is no evidence Somerset maintained a close relationship with his beleaguered uncle and therefore he may have had no qualms about charging Gloucester with treason. One wonders, however, whether he did so against the private wishes of his father – and, if so, was this the moment John Beaufort emerged from the shadows as his own man, acting of his own volition?

If Gaunt had any concerns about presiding over the trial of his brother, he needn't have worried. Shortly before the spectacle, a declaration was read on behalf of Gloucester's captor, Thomas Mowbray, earl of Nottingham, that the duke had died during imprisonment in Calais.[14] No one was fooled. It was widely believed Gloucester had been put to death on the orders of the king, with Walsingham believing 'quilts and bedclothes stuffed with feathers were thrown over his face' until he was suffocated.[15] Froissart suggested the duke was strangled to death.[16] By whichever method

the dastardly deed was done, the outcome remained; any threat posed by Thomas of Woodstock, youngest son of Edward III, had been brutally suppressed.

After the ruthless destruction of his enemies, Richard set about rewarding several of his noblemen, intending to secure their support as he grew increasingly unpredictable. On 29 September 1397, two of the Appellants who had hitherto escaped persecution, Henry of Bolingbroke and Thomas Mowbray, were raised to the ducal titles of Hereford and Norfolk respectively. The king's half-brother John Holland, a son-in-law of Gaunt through his marriage to Elizabeth of Lancaster and thus the Beauforts' half-brother-in-law, was created duke of Exeter while his nephew Thomas Holland became duke of Surrey. Edward, earl of Rutland and son of Edmund of Langley, received the dukedom of Aumale.[17] Many other men were rewarded by the king, who used lands and income taken from the forfeited estates of the three fallen Lords Appellant for the purpose. It was extensive bribery on an unprecedented scale.

Richard was careful not to exclude his Beaufort cousins, presumably wary of alienating Gaunt. Only seven months after he was raised to the earldom of Somerset, John Beaufort was created Marquis of Dorset,[18] while on 28 September he received several manors formerly belonging to Warwick, including the manors of Drayton Bassett, Walsall, Perry, Hamstead and Barr in Staffordshire, Buckby in Northamptonshire, Cherhill and Hinton in Wiltshire, and Necton and Cressingham in Norfolk.[19] On 20 November, he was also the recipient of a grant of 400 marks from the lands of the recently deceased Thomas Raleigh and, more importantly, the constableship of Wallingford Castle, for which he was to be paid 100 marks a year.[20] Wallingford, on the west banks of the Thames near Oxford, held personal significance for the king as it formed part of his father Edward's estate and was where his mother Joan of Kent died in 1385. Although the constableship passed to Somerset's cousin Thomas Chaucer only two years later, it nonetheless capped an impressive array of titles and lands in the six months since John's legitimisation. His brother-in-law Ralph Neville, meanwhile, was created earl of

Westmorland, providing a significant boost to the living conditions and status of Joan Beaufort, the new countess.[21]

Despite his generosity to the Beauforts, the unpredictable king, always susceptible to sudden outbreaks of belligerent behaviour, had begun to 'rule more harshly than before',[22] and took to spending hours sitting on his throne levying unreasonable forced loans on his subjects. Richard had also taken to travelling with an intimidating bodyguard of three hundred Cheshire men-at-arms who harassed the locals wherever they went, 'committing adulteries, murders, and other evils without end'.[23] Elaborate royal protocol was also introduced, and the king reproached any man who failed to adhere to his will. Such behaviour only served to alienate the king from many of his subjects.

For the Lancastrians, including the Beauforts, the tense atmosphere around the royal court took an alarming turn in December 1397 when Bolingbroke, now duke of Hereford, was riding to Windsor alongside Thomas Mowbray, duke of Norfolk. The two remaining Lord Appellants fell into conversation when Norfolk alleged the king was plotting to kill Hereford and his father Gaunt. Norfolk, who Adam of Usk considered 'full of pride and presumption',[24] opined that the king coveted the vast Lancastrian estate, and planned to destroy the Beauforts in the process. It was a distressing revelation, but was it true?

It's certainly plausible the increasingly despotic king felt confident enough to make a move against his uncle and cousins. There is little reason to doubt Richard envied Gaunt's colossal wealth, for most men in England did. Conversely, Norfolk may have been acting in his own interest, either plotting rebellion against the king by seeking the support of his fellow duke or attempting to encourage Hereford to launch a self-destructive attack on the crown from which Norfolk could indirectly benefit. As captain of Calais, Mowbray had overseen the death of Gloucester and it was not beyond the scheming duke to try and remove another fellow Appellant.

Whatever prompted the revelations, Hereford informed his father, who in turn confronted the king. Gaunt's intentions at this juncture

are transparent; Norfolk had been intimately involved in plots against the duke of Lancaster's life in 1385, and was also privy to the murder of his brother Gloucester. By exposing these latest allegations to the king, Gaunt anticipated an eruption of fury in Richard that would hopefully end in Norfolk's destruction. While the wily Gaunt was not to be disappointed, he had failed to foresee the blowback on his own son. The incensed king predictably rejected the allegations against him, prompting Hereford and Norfolk to publicly turn on one another. Both dukes accused the other of fomenting treason, forcing the king to announce he required time to deliberate on the matter in order to find a suitable resolution.[25] It was not a good sign for those involved.

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Political manoeuvring notwithstanding, age had begun to take its toll on John of Gaunt, who was debilitated by illness shortly after parliament dissolved at the end of January 1398. He spent the early part of February recuperating from his fever at Lilleshall Abbey in Shropshire, cared for by his duchess Katherine Swynford. The stress of Hereford's perilous situation could not have aided the duke's recovery, and the Beauforts must have grown increasingly concerned at this worrying deterioration in their father's health. Although starting to make their own way in the world, the siblings still relied heavily on his guidance, particularly in such troublesome times. After a prolonged period of rest the duke did eventually rally, and after his induction into Lilleshall's confraternity, gratefully left the abbey a gift of twenty pounds on his departure.[26]

Although presumably troubled by their father's health and distressed by Norfolk's allegations, evidence suggests the Beauforts retained the king's favour during this period of uncertainty. On 5 February 1398 at Shrewsbury, Somerset was appointed Warden of the Cinque Ports and Constable of Dover Castle,[27] which on 9 May was augmented by his appointment as the King's Admiral of the Fleet in the North and West.[28] In August, he was also appointed King's Lieutenant in Aquitaine, to be fulfilled for a period of seven years.

Plans were initiated at the end of the month for the marquis to travel to the duchy, with the king's Serjeant-at-Arms Robert Sapirton charged to acquire all 'ships, barges, balingers, and other vessels' from the Thames up to Kingston-upon-Hull in one direction, and down to Southampton in the other, 'for the passage to Aquitaine of John, marquess of Dorset, the king's lieutenant there, and cause them to be brought to Plymouth'. Anyone who resisted the order was to be imprisoned.[29]

The grants continued into the autumn; on 24 October, the Sheriff of Dorset was ordered to pay the marquis thirty-five marks a year due to his elevation, while on 8 November the merchants of Sandwich in Kent, one of the Cinque Ports, were commanded to pay their warden 100 marks a year for the right to trade in wool, hides and woolfells.[30] Each grant that came John's way further consolidated his growing influence in various parts of the kingdom.

Not to be outdone by his brother, on 27 February 1398 Henry Beaufort was remarkably named bishop of Lincoln by Pope Boniface IX, disregarding his tender age and obvious inexperience for the role. He was only twenty-three years old. Although it appeared the bishopric was bestowed upon Henry due to the pope's 'respect and love for the duke of Lancaster',[31] one shouldn't discount his thorough education in theology, which perhaps was ample preparation for the position. After surrendering his previous offices, with the exception of the wardenship of Tickhill, Henry was officially consecrated on 14 July 1398. As with a king, a bishop underwent an enthroning ceremony prior to taking up his position, and at Lincoln the incoming bishop traditionally stayed at St Katherine's Priory, just south of the city, on the night before the service.

On the morning of his consecration, Henry rode from the priory to one of the city's gateways where he humbly removed his shoes before continuing his journey barefoot to the cathedral doors. Received by the dean and prior, Henry swore an oath of fidelity to defend and uphold the rights and liberties of the Church, earnestly vowing to protect the interests of the diocese and its inhabitants.[32] Once all

religious rituals had been observed and the inauguration completed, Henry took his seat upon the episcopal throne and thoughts turned to the lavish feast that followed. One wonders whether the bishop displayed any nerves during the ceremony, particularly taking into account his unusually young age. Henry may very well have confidently risen to the occasion; his later character as one of England's foremost public servants strongly suggests he was a natural when placed in front of substantial crowds.

As bishop of Lincoln, Henry was permitted to use several residences belonging to the bishopric, including the grand Bishop's Palace opposite the cathedral. The palace afforded Henry commanding views of the medieval town, and served as the administrative and legislative centre of the diocese, the largest in the kingdom and stretching from the Humber in the north to the rural Thames in the south. If Henry preferred a more rustic environment, perhaps to indulge in activities such as hunting or falconry, then he had the option of either a palace in Stow, or a castle in Sleaford, two locations he made ready use of. Stow was less than ten miles north-east of Kettlethorpe, which made it a convenient location to visit the home of his mother Katherine Swynford, while the quadrilateral castle at Sleaford was renowned for its bountiful lands, which, when cultivated, provided the bishop with an extra source of income and provisions for his own consumption. Further afield was Newark Castle, constructed in 1135 on the east bank of the Trent and conveniently situated just off the Great North Road, with minor residences in other locations such as Banbury and Nettleham.

While visiting London, Henry resided at the Old Temple in Holborn, originally belonging to the Knights Templar before its purchase for the bishops of Lincoln in 1161. The temple was built using Caen stone, similar to that used for the Tower of London and parts of Westminster Abbey, and had been partially constructed in a striking circular manner. The Old Temple covered much of what is now the northern end of Chancery Lane, and ranked among the finest episcopal houses in London. Quite simply, wherever Henry was based he was spoilt for choice when it came to property, courtesy of the

Church.

After Henry's enthronement in Lincoln, Katherine Swynford could proudly claim to be the mother of a marquis, a countess and a bishop, a scenario that must have seemed unfathomable in the bleak period following the Peasants' Revolt. In stark contrast to Norfolk's claim that the Beauforts were about to be undone by the king, evidence suggests they were very much in the ascendancy, even as their half-brother Henry of Bolingbroke remained at the mercy of the paranoid sovereign.

On 29 April 1398, a decision was reached regarding the duke of Hereford; it was decreed he would face Norfolk in combat, quite literally a life-or-death fight. The king's half-hearted attempts to reconcile his warring lords had floundered when both not only refused to withdrew their allegations, but 'answered that never should peace be made between them'.[33] The contest, from which only one man would emerge alive, was scheduled for 16 September. In an astoundingly risky display of solidarity with his half-brother, on 23 August Henry Beaufort made a public declaration of support for his 'most honourable and dear brother' in preparation for Hereford's deadly duel with a 'certain adversary', further using his prerogative as bishop to command prayers and processions to take place across his diocese for the duke.[34] Devotion to the Lancastrian cause, a constant theme throughout Henry Beaufort's later life, was clearly something he ascribed to when merely a novice bishop.

On the day of the duel, to take place on Gosford Green near Coventry, the royal court assembled to find out which nobleman would emerge from the brutal contest as the victor. In attendance were the king and his young queen, the nervous duke and duchess of Lancaster, and most of the curious nobility. To some it was a wretched occasion, while to others it promised to be an entertaining spectacle akin to the gladiatorial contests of ancient Rome. Hereford prepared for the challenge in a pavilion 'covered with red roses' and, suited in his finest armour, 'signed himself with the sign of the cross' before calling for his lance.[35] With both dukes equipped with a variety of

weaponry designed to destroy his opponent, the event was abruptly halted by the king just before it started; he summoned the dukes to kneel before him and, without a trial or the opportunity to protest, sentenced Hereford to ten years' banishment and Norfolk for life.[36]

It was a vindictive show of strength from the king, ruthless in its execution and shrewd in its objective. Although the sentence was deemed by Walsingham, no friend of Gaunt, to be 'contrary to justice, the laws of knighthood and the customs of the kingdom',[37] the king was not challenged. Richard had satisfied his quest for revenge on the five lords who had rebelled against his reign a decade earlier, removing the last two from his kingdom without the need of the chopping block.

The news was devastating to Gaunt, forced to separate from his beloved son while contemplating the destruction of all his achievements over the last three decades. Although Hereford's sentence was shortened to six years from its initial ten, the increasingly infirm duke was fearful he would never again see his son, who was ordered to leave England by 20 October 1398. That Hereford had 'performed his duty so gallantly' was to no avail.[38]

While Norfolk set off on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, dying in Venice the following year, Hereford chose to stay relatively close to England, heading for the French court in Paris. There is no evidence of what the Beauforts made of the proceedings, but they did appear to have an amicable relationship with their half-brother. If nothing else, they had lost an influential ally at court. One of the Beauforts did benefit from the fallout, however; on 24 September, Thomas Beaufort was granted Norfolk's lordship of Castle Acre along with 100 marks a year.[39]

Throughout the winter of 1398 John of Gaunt struggled to shake off another lingering illness, which left him bedridden in Leicester Castle, and as Christmas passed it became apparent the mighty duke was dying. On 3 February 1399 his will was drawn up in anticipation of his demise, and the ink was barely dry on the parchment when later that day Gaunt, 'the illustrious duke of Lancaster, of deservedly pious memory',[40] passed away.

Gaunt wasn't alone in his final moments, for he was with his duchess Katherine, although there is no record of the presence of their Beaufort offspring. Henry Beaufort did, however, escort his father's body as it was transported from Leicester to London, where he had requested to be buried. An undignified row broke out when the cortege reached St Albans Abbey in Hertfordshire, where the ducal party had planned to rest overnight.

Abbot John de la Moote refused to admit his prestigious visitors, interpreting Henry's presence as bishop of Lincoln to be a threat to the independent jurisdiction of the abbey. St Albans had been granted an exemption from the episcopal authority of the See of Lincoln in the middle of the twelfth century, and the abbot voiced concerns this immunity would be risked if Henry was admitted into the abbey to conduct the Mass. After the calming intervention of Robert Braybooke, bishop of London, a conciliatory Henry addressed the abbot's concerns and pledged he would not seek any changes to the abbey's long-standing privileges, with a royal writ subsequently produced to that effect.[41] Henry had learned a vital lesson early in his career that his title and ancestry alone would not prevent occasional challenges to his authority from stubborn quarters.

On 16 March, at St Paul's Cathedral, Gaunt was buried 'with great honours'[42] and, in accordance with the conditions of his will, was interred near the principal altar and next to his 'most dear late wife Blanch'.[43] Katherine Swynford was present for the funeral, as were the king and the royal court, and although no reference is made to the Beauforts, it seems likely John and Henry were in St Paul's by virtue of their titles if nothing else.

The duke's will demonstrated his favourable feelings towards Katherine and the Beauforts. Referring to his third spouse as 'my most dear wife Katherine', he left her the 'two best nouches which I have' as well as a 'large cup of gold'. A nouche was a type of brooch or clasp that was typically worn as a piece of jewellery by both sexes, although it did sometimes have a practical purpose in fastening garments. They were often valuable items and typically adorned with diamonds or

other gems. One imagines that for a man as wealthy as Gaunt, his best brooches were of the uttermost quality, and presumably worth a hefty sum of money. Of more personal consequence was his bequeathing of all 'buckles, rings, diamonds, rubies, and other things, that will be found in a little box of cypress wood, of which I carry the key myself'. Katherine also received 'a large bed of black velvet, embroidered with a circle of fetter-locks' and all the 'goods and jewels which I have given her since the marriage'.

Although Gaunt requested to be buried with his first wife Blanche, his affection for his third wife, and concern for her financial situation after his death, is palpable. The Beaufort children were not overlooked either. All his sons were bequeathed a dozen saucers each and some money, while Henry, 'the Reverend Father in God and my dear son the Bishop of Lincoln', received the duke's missal, a liturgical book used for the celebration of Mass. Joan, the duke's only Beaufort daughter, received a 'silk bed, and a cup and cover of gold'.[44]

The ambitious duke had been resolute when pursuing an objective, possessing an arrogance that came with an incomparable wealth coupled with an impeccable pedigree. He was temperamental and hard-headed when he felt he was not receiving due respect, although loyal beyond reproach, firstly to his father and then to his nephew Richard, even if the latter seemed intent on destroying his family. Gaunt was a nobleman of learned disposition, a patron of the arts with a keen passion for erecting spectacular palatial residences. Chaucer and the Savoy are a testament to this. It may even be argued that Gaunt was a Renaissance prince a century before it became fashionable in England.

Although he never secured a crown for himself, the duke did father three children who became sovereigns; his eldest son became king of England while two of his daughters became queens, one of Portugal and the other of Castile. If the Beauforts had needed an example of how to carry themselves as nobility, there was no finer path to follow than that of their father.

The duke's death occurred at a crucial juncture for England and

her people. King Richard had become an autocratic liability, an increasingly erratic and ruthless tyrant. With the calming influence of Gaunt now removed, the remaining nobles desperately vied with each other to obtain and retain the favour of their sovereign, often at the expense of acting in the greater good. It was a period of self-preservation, in which the Beauforts found themselves immersed without the guiding counsel of their father to see them through. For those disenfranchised with Richard's reign, the focus gradually turned away from England and towards France. There was only one man who could liberate them from the king's oppressive regime, and that was the Beauforts' half-brother, Henry of Bolingbroke.

John of Gaunt may have held ambitions to be called king, but despite accusations to the contrary he never sought to press a claim for the crown of England. His son Henry, however, was a man of a different temperament. He also wanted a crown, and this time it wasn't one that belonged to a foreign ruler in Castile – it was that which rested uneasily on the head of his cousin Richard.

5

The King's Siblings 1399–1400

On 4 July 1399, eight small ships and two boats landed on the shoreline near Ravenspur in East Yorkshire carrying an armed force of 'scarce three hundred followers' who had sailed from Boulogne in France.[1] Having arrived safely in England, the men regrouped and awaited orders from their leader. Henry of Bolingbroke, banished from England and stripped of his Lancastrian inheritance by his cousin Richard II, had been backed into a corner, and rather than meekly accepting his fate he chose to come out swinging. His impulsiveness and thirst for survival altered the political landscape of England forever, and with it the destiny of his Beaufort kin.

After John of Gaunt's death in February 1399 the king had resolved to crush the Lancastrian hegemony, and on 18 March 1399 declared any lands, titles and possessions belonging to the dead duke forfeit to the crown. In the blink of an eye, Richard had seized the greatest inheritance in England from Bolingbroke, still languishing in exile in France. It seemed clear the king 'had no sincere love for the duke of Hereford' and that he had been ruthlessly banished as 'it was a good opportunity of seizing the duke's property'.[2] As Richard was only thirty-two years old, and anticipated ruling for many years yet, Henry had little option other than to die a penniless exile or to launch an explosive counter-attack on his cousin. He chose the latter, and speedily assembled a loyal band of followers which included the exiled Thomas Arundel, the deposed archbishop of Canterbury.

While Bolingbroke marched across the north, Richard was in Ireland, having landed on 1 June. Accompanied by most of his lords, including Henry Beaufort, the king planned to 'wage war against the

Irish' but his absence provided Bolingbroke with a golden opportunity to advance through the unguarded kingdom. He steadily recruited supporters to his cause, although it is unclear if he disclosed to them his intentions regarding the throne. It's probable some among his force could not conceive of the deposition of an anointed monarch and were led to believe they were merely helping their leader recapture his Lancastrian inheritance.[3]

While in the north, Bolingbroke took the opportunity to visit some of the seized Lancastrian estates, including Pickering, Knaresborough and Pontefract. All three castles were occupied by men whose affiliation had previously lain with John of Gaunt, and some of these former Lancastrian adherents transferred their loyalties to the son of the deceased duke. After marching south and reaching Doncaster, Bolingbroke was met by several of the most prominent noblemen in the north, including Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland, his son Henry 'Hotspur' Percy, and Ralph Neville, earl of Westmorland and husband of Joan Beaufort. Had Neville been urged by his wife to help her half-brother? Each man brought with him a substantial retinue, which bolstered Bolingbroke's force by hundreds, if not thousands, of men-at-arms, and it appeared as though 'all the people of the north country came there to aid him'.[4]

The army advanced through the heartland of England, passing through Derby, Leicester, Coventry, Warwick and Evesham, arriving at Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire on 27 July. Here Henry met with his uncle Edmund, duke of York, appointed protector of the kingdom while Richard was in Ireland. York had been charged with raising an army to defend Richard's interests, with instructions for him to be assisted by John Beaufort, Marquis of Dorset, who on 7 July had been requested by the Council to postpone his expected departure for Aquitaine 'for urgent reasons concerning the safety of the realm'.[5] What matters were discussed during the summit of York and Bolingbroke are unknown, but events were to show that the duke had tacitly decided to favour one nephew over the other.

The following day, Bolingbroke travelled twenty miles south and

captured Bristol Castle. Three of Richard's 'most evil councillors and chief fosterers of his malice',[6] William le Scrope, earl of Wiltshire, Sir John Bussy and Henry Green, were captured and 'amid the shouting of the commons were beheaded'.[7] The bloody deed shed any pretence of peace and was an act of outright hostility from Bolingbroke that could only end in either his death or the king's deposition. With 'an innumerable army', the odds were quickly edging in favour of the invader.[8]

Richard was forced to confront the threat to his crown and set out for the mainland 'in the full glory of war and wealth',[9] having first secured Bolingbroke's teenage son Henry of Monmouth, part of the royal party, in Trim Castle. The king landed in Milford Haven on the west coast of Wales but soon deserted his army, lacking the courage to continue into southern England. He headed north through the Welsh countryside, intending to reach his Duchy of Chester where he enjoyed great support. Richard reached Conwy Castle on 11 August, but his relief was tempered when he discovered he had been outwitted by his cousin. Bolingbroke, anticipating the king's movements, also travelled north, arriving in Chester on the 9th. With entry to England blocked, Richard anxiously attempted to open negotiations.

The king's Holland kinsmen, John, duke of Exeter, and Thomas, duke of Surrey, were sent to Bolingbroke with instructions, but were promptly arrested before they could deliver their terms. Northumberland was sent in the opposite direction to Conwy to provide assurances to Richard that his life was not in danger and the king, acknowledging the futility of protest, was escorted to Flint Castle on the English-Welsh border where, on 16 August, he met his fully armed captor face to face. Richard was advised Henry would now govern the realm, and 'having gloriously, within fifty days, conquered both king and kingdom, marched to London'.[10] By 2 September, Richard was lodged in the Tower of London. Bolingbroke, meanwhile, went straight to St Paul's and knelt 'at the tomb of his father, where he wept exceedingly'.[11]

What followed next is disputed, with conflicting accounts

appearing in the contemporary chronicles. On 29 September, the day before parliament was due to convene, Adam of Usk alleged that the lords and clergy abruptly renounced their allegiance to the king, 'and holding him henceforth not for a king, but for a private person, Sir Richard of Bordeaux, a simple knight'.[12] The *Brut* corroborated this to some extent, adding that once the king was locked up in the Tower, he was deposed by 'all his lords counsel, and by the common assent of all the Reme'.[13]

Walsingham believed Richard willingly conceded his crown, provided he 'was given a livelihood suitable to his position'.[14] The *Croyland Chronicle* meanwhile notes the king appointed others 'in his name to resign the crown of his kingdom'.[15] It seems unlikely a king as arrogant as Richard willingly relinquished his crown, and the accounts of the *Brut* and Adam of Usk are probably closer to the truth. The king had simply lost the support of his parliament, his nobles and his people.

Whether stripped of the crown or coerced into giving it up, the outcome remained; Richard II was deposed. When parliament opened, the throne was conspicuously empty until Bolingbroke rose from his seat and boldly declared he would gladly accept the crown, announcing:

> In the name of God, I, Henry of Lancastre, challenge this reiaume, this the corone, with all the membris and appurtenaunce thereto, save the ryght blood coming of the Kyng Henry, and thorghe that ryght that Gode of hys grace hath sent me, with the help of my kyn and of my frendes to recovere it; the which roiaume was in poynt to ben undon for defaute of governaunce and undoyng of the laws.[16]

One by one, the lords spiritual and temporal voiced their approval. To justify the deposition, thirty-two articles were read out, representing each instance in which Richard had violated his oath. For good measure, the deposed king was accused by Walsingham of being 'deeply inadequate and lacking the intelligence for ruling and

governing his kingdoms'.[17]

Bolingbroke had accomplished his objective and assumed the throne as Henry IV, the first king of the House of Lancaster. His coronation was held on 13 October and two of his Beaufort half-brothers participated in the proceedings as part of an immense procession from the Tower to Westminster on the day before the crowning. Having been young children when the previous king was crowned in 1377, and probably not even in the capital at the time, John and Henry Beaufort could not have helped but be impressed by the occasion as they followed the king through the teeming streets, each of which had been excessively decorated with celebratory tapestries hung from various windows. Abundant supplies of wine had also been provided for the benefit of crowds caught up in the excitement of the day and the promise of a prosperous new era.

During the coronation ceremony, John, as a ranking nobleman, was 'robed finely in red and scarlet and ermine' and bore one of four swords, 'wrapped in red and bound round with golden bands to represent twofold mercy'.[18] He was also accorded the honoured position King's Carver during the evening banquet, a ceremonial role he shared with the dukes of Aumale, Surrey and Exeter, and the earl of Warwick. Fittingly, his father had performed the same duty at the coronation of Richard II. As a bishop, Henry Beaufort was employed to assist his half-brother's consecration, and while there is no record of Thomas, it seems likely, with his age around twenty-two, that he too was present among the onlookers.

As Richard II was childless, it was already anticipated that the inheritance of the crown would pass to the next senior claimant; however, it is arguable whether or not this claimant was Henry of Bolingbroke. His father's elder brother, Lionel of Antwerp, duke of Clarence, had surviving descendants, albeit in the female line. Clarence had died in 1368, leaving only a daughter, Philippa, who through her marriage with Edmund Mortimer, 3rd Earl of March, had four children, with the eldest, Roger, often presumed to be Richard's heir for much of the latter's reign. Roger had the misfortune to pre-

decease his cousin, perishing during the Irish campaign in 1398 with his claim transmitted to his young son, Edmund. The 5th Earl was around seven years old at the time of Richard's deposition, and it's debatable whether the commons of England favoured another child king. The crux of the succession matter was that Bolingbroke was a grandson of Edward III, only through the third son but crucially in the male line. Edmund Mortimer was a great-great-grandson of Edward III through the second son, albeit in the female line. In terms of private property, inheritance was often acceptable through a female line, but it was uncertain whether this principle applied to the throne.

Edward III had planned for this eventuality in the last year of his reign. Although his will, written in October 1376, indicated no other heir than his grandson Richard,[19] a charter that dates from around the same time named Gaunt and his heirs next in line to the throne, followed by his youngest son Thomas of Woodstock. There is no mention of Clarence, suggesting Edward's thoughts on the succession of England were that it should descend through the male line only.[20] It's an intriguing viewpoint, almost hypocritical, when one considers how ardently the great king claimed the French throne through his mother. There may be another reason for this stance, however.

Towards the end of 1376, Edward was increasingly incapacitated through illness, with the kingdom effectively governed by Gaunt. The duke was accused of forcing the issue of the succession during parliament that year, with an unabashed preference for enacting the French Salic law. The passing of such a law would have placed him and his heirs ahead of the Mortimers in the line of succession, but his plans were scuppered when parliament refused to cooperate. Shortly afterwards, the king's document supporting the duke's plan was conveniently drafted. Was this done at Gaunt's bidding? Nonetheless, the charter never received parliamentary assent and was, therefore, largely irrelevant in ultimately determining the succession. Richard II, meanwhile, had named no heir in his own will, dated 1399.[21]

With no codified law in place to settle the issue, might was undoubtedly right and it was Bolingbroke who stepped forward and

snatched the crown. Crucially, he then secured the assent of parliament, after the fact. The Mortimer claim was disregarded, only eventually to be assumed by the earl of March's nephew Richard, duke of York five decades later. As outlined above, however, it is unclear whether this Mortimer-Yorkist claim was ever truly more senior than that of Lancaster, as is often supposed. There are valid arguments for both sides, but ultimately it was the ability to physically seize, and keep, the throne that determined who became king.

The remainder of the year, the last of the fourteenth century, was spent consolidating the Lancastrian regime. The king's precocious young son Henry of Monmouth was reknighted by his father and raised to the dukedoms of Lancaster and Aquitaine. More importantly, he was invested with titles traditionally reserved for heirs to the crown, becoming Prince of Wales, duke of Cornwall and earl of Chester. Even so, Henry IV did not have the full support of all his nobles and, shortly after Christmas, was forced to deal with the first of many plots that would occur throughout his troublesome reign.

In January 1400, a group headed by Richard's Holland kinsmen plotted to assassinate the king and his sons while they attended a tournament at Windsor Castle. The Hollands, enraged by Richard's deposition and the subsequent loss of their dukedoms, found willing allies in John Montagu, earl of Salisbury, and Thomas le Despenser, formerly earl of Gloucester. Their rebellion, known as the Epiphany Rising, was exposed to the king before it could be put into action and the ringleaders were quickly apprehended and killed. If Henry had intended to keep Richard alive, if imprisoned, then his hand was forced by the actions of his supporters. As a 'prudente and politike persone',[22] he knew what had to be done.

Richard was transferred from London to the Lancastrian stronghold of Pontefract in Yorkshire, where Adam of Usk suggested his end came 'as he lay in chains', adding he was 'tormented by Sir N. Swinford with starving fare'.[23] This was possibly an erroneous reference to the Beauforts' half-brother Thomas Swynford, who was certainly well rewarded during Henry IV's reign, becoming one of his Chamber

Knights and appointed sheriff of Lincoln and deputy captain of Calais. A second account corroborates that death occurred by starvation, although the *Croyland Chronicle* believed it was self-inflicted. Richard, having been informed of the failure of the Epiphany Rising and the deaths of the Hollands, supposedly vowed to cease eating, and 'after abstaining from sustenance five days and as many nights, he departed from this life, miserably dying of hunger'.[24] He had been a spiteful and temperamental prince, often paranoid, ruthless and vain, and it's a telling fact that once Henry invaded, large parts of the kingdom deserted Richard's side.

For the Beauforts, Henry's accession represented a significant step closer to the crown. They were no longer merely cousins to the king, but rather the sovereign's siblings. For John Beaufort, the decision to support his half-brother's usurpation must have been a vexing one. The Marquis of Dorset and Somerset owed his title to the patronage of Richard, who had been generous in his treatment of John. As late as 2 February 1399, Somerset had been appointed Admiral of the Fleet of Ireland, while a month earlier he secured a pardon from Richard on behalf of Laurence Taylor, a man accused of ambushing and murdering Richard de Middle Rawcliff.[25] On 7 April, he also overturned a decision made by the Council to seize several lands belonging to his deceased father, arguing Gaunt had granted him, for life, the manors of Almondebury, Bradford and Bradfordale in Yorkshire along with the annual rent from the manor of Thoresby in Lincolnshire.[26] It's certainly possible the king had personally intervened in the matter on behalf of his cousin and indeed, just over a week later, on 16 April, Richard named the marquis one of the witnesses for his will, further evidence of the good relations between the pair.[27]

It is interesting to note, also, that there is no record of Somerset condemning the banishment of his half-brother. Was this because John was still a novice at court and felt he was in no position to defend Bolingbroke while openly opposing the judgement of a king to whom he owed his accumulated manors and titles, or was there a darker motive? As a legitimate son of John of Gaunt, Somerset was

technically the next senior male heir of the Lancastrian duke, and may have anticipated receiving some of the vast inheritance if his half-brother was out of the way. Later events show Somerset was incredibly loyal to Henry but the thought must surely have crossed his mind at the time, and perhaps only when the invasion was underway was he forced to suppress such ambition.

After his coronation, Henry IV readily acknowledged he did not enjoy complete support among his nobility, and the formation of a faithful affinity was paramount for his safety and that of his family. It was envisaged his Beaufort kin would become an integral part of such a powerbase, and consequently Somerset's support of Richard was quickly pardoned. There had been a worrying period for the marquis shortly after he was confronted by his half-brother's forces at Bristol during the invasion campaign when the influential Percys implored Bolingbroke to have John executed:

> The Earl of Northumberland and Sir Henry Percy would have had the Marquis put to death or hung; but the Duke of Lancaster pulled out a letter from his pouch of blue velvet, and said 'I beseech you do him no harm, for he is my brother, and has always been my friend; see the letter he sent to me in France'. The Duke and the Marquis then embraced each other.[28]

Had John Beaufort played a double game, remaining loyal to his half-brother while convincing Richard II he was, in fact, the king's true liege man? Such a scenario may explain why the marquis had not immediately rushed to Bolingbroke's side as other men such as their brother-in-law Ralph Neville had, and why he had not protested the exile. Nonetheless, he was still stripped of his marquisate after Henry's accession and demoted to his previous title, earl of Somerset. He was also commanded to relinquish the constableship of Dover Castle and the wardenship of the Cinque Ports, which were bestowed upon long-serving Lancastrian soldier Thomas Erpingham, as well as the Staffordshire estates, which went to the earl of Warwick.[29]

Somerset was compensated in other areas, for on 7 November 1399 ‘the king’s brother’ was appointed Chamberlain of England.[30] His role was to oversee the running of the king’s household, ensuring Henry’s private apartments were adequately maintained, furnished and appropriately staffed. In theory, he controlled access to the king’s chamber, a respite from court for Henry where he slept, prayed, relaxed and conducted business. Somerset was assisted by Erpingham, who served with the earl until 1404, when he was replaced by Richard Grey, Lord Codnor. The position provided Somerset with a considerable influence in the new governance of the kingdom, and he retained the office until his death in 1410.

He also further ingratiated himself with the king when he played a leading role in Henry’s confidante Thomas Arundel recovering his possessions after the latter’s restoration to the archbishopric of Canterbury. Arundel had appealed to parliament to return all property that had been taken by Roger Walden during his absence. According to Adam of Usk, after Somerset learned of the cleric’s landing in England, he seized ‘six cart-loads from the hands of Walden’s servants, which he had sent off to Saltwood castle for safety, and afterwards delivered all to the said Thomas’.[31] It was a prudent act, which bolstered the earl’s standing with his peers.

Somerset was not alone among the Beauforts in receiving favourable treatment; on 18 November 1399, young Thomas Beaufort received one his first grants of note when he was assigned the manors of Sentling in the parish of St Mary Cray in Kent, Knell in Sussex, and Crux Easton in Hampshire, properties that had previously been in the ownership of Robert Belknap.[32] They provided the youngest Beaufort with a steady income until it could be decided by the king how he was to be endowed in future.

As the fourteenth century came to its dramatic close, the Beauforts were well placed to take advantage of their connection to the new regime. John Beaufort, earl of Somerset and the king’s chamberlain, was in his late twenties and evidently adept at dealing with a wide range of political and martial issues. Henry Beaufort was around

twenty-five years old and learning the ropes as bishop of Lincoln, while Thomas Beaufort had recently reached adulthood and was ready to put his body on the line for his king. Their sole sister Joan, meanwhile, had settled into married life as the countess of Westmorland, establishing a Beaufort-blooded Neville hegemony in the north.

As siblings to the king of England, a promising future beckoned for the foursome. Provided they retained the good grace of their half-brother, they had reasonable expectations of widespread patronage that included money, manors and titles. What they may not have considered, however, is how hard the family would have to work over the next few years to reap such benefits. The kingdom was not at peace, nor could it be after the deposition of a king and with old loyalties lingering. Not for the first time in English history, keeping a crown proved more difficult than winning one, and for the Beauforts, their very existence depended on their half-brother keeping his.

6

Rebellion
1400–1403

Although Henry IV entered a new century as the first Lancastrian king of England, he faced the unenviable task of securing a throne he had so boldly usurped. While in theory it appeared to be the case of merely replacing one figurehead with another, the ripple effect throughout the kingdom quickly became evident as divisions grew between new factions in the ascendancy and those they had displaced.

Richard II had been king for twenty-two years and during that time had cultivated a loyal affinity that had revelled in unprecedented patronage. With a truculent sweep of a Lancastrian hand, those same men now lost the privileged positions they had grown accustomed to, in some cases even their titles. While the Epiphany Rising of January 1400 had been successfully repressed, new threats soon emerged, most notably from the Welsh.

Although conquered by the formidable Edward I after a crushing invasion in 1282, followed by a rigorous castle-building campaign over the next decade, Welsh resistance continued to rear its violent head at various points over the next century. Generally, however, the *uchelwyr*, or noblemen descended from the pre-Conquest royals, were compelled to cooperate with their new overlords to retain any degree of prosperity. By 1399, one of the more renowned members of this emergent gentry class was Owain Glyn Dwˆr, who oversaw an extensive estate in the north-east of Wales.

Glyn Dwˆr, a learned man with a charismatic personality, possessed an impeccable pedigree that connected him with three individual royal dynasties of pre-Conquest Wales. Even so, he had married a daughter of one of Richard II's judges before entering the

service of the English king himself around 1384, even fighting against the Scots throughout the following decade. Having returned to his ancestral lands towards the end of the century, however, Glyn Dwˆr was dragged into a bitter land dispute with his neighbour Reginald Grey, 3rd Baron Grey de Ruthin, after the latter seized some of the Welshman's property.

Glyn Dwˆr may have been on favourable terms with Richard II, but he enjoyed no such relationship with his successor Henry IV who, far from being sympathetic to the Welshman's cause, duly awarded custody of the lands to Grey. Exacerbating the situation was the accusation of treason levelled at Glyn Dwˆr by the wily Grey, who had failed to provide his adversary with a summons from the king requesting troops for a renewed Scottish campaign. When no soldiers from Glyn Dwˆr materialised, his fate was sealed. It was an effective, if underhanded, tactic from Grey that prompted the Welshman to grow fearful for his future under the Lancastrian regime. Like a cornered dog, he was left with little choice than to go on the offensive. Henry IV must surely have been able to relate to this, considering his similar predicament a few months earlier.

With rising discontent from Welsh quarters, plus the ever-present threat from the Scots and French, it was imperative for Henry to secure his kingdom, a burden which necessitated the death of Richard II. The presence of the Beauforts by his side, the closest kin Henry had in England other than his own children, must have been reassuring, and he encouraged their continuing loyalty by lavishing further grants upon his half-siblings. As the eldest brother, John Beaufort naturally received the bulk of such rewards. On 22 January 1400 he took ownership of all lands, castles and lordships belonging to Ralph de Lumley, 1st Baron Lumley, who had been attainted for participating in the Epiphany Rising, while on 10 February he was confirmed for life in his position as Chamberlain of England.[1] Then, on 12 February, Henry Beaufort was granted custody of some Lincolnshire lands belonging to the disgraced Thomas Holland, earl of Kent; the manors of Brattleby and Willingham by Stow were worth 40 marks a year and within convenient distance of the bishop's base in and around

Lincoln.[2]

Thomas Beaufort also benefitted from the Epiphany Rising when on 24 March he was granted Kent's manor of Ashford, Derbyshire,[3] while a month later he was inducted into the Order of the Garter, replacing the degraded earl and joining his brother John as one of the prestigious companion knights. As there was no financial benefit to be gained from a place in the Order, Thomas's meagre income was boosted by the king in October when he was given the lands and possessions of the recently deceased knight Baldwin de Freville.[4]

In August, King Henry assembled a colossal army and travelled north to the Scottish borders, the campaign for which Grey fatefully withheld the summons from Glyn Dwˆr. John and Thomas Beaufort were present for the excursion, and formed part of the formidable force that crossed into Scotland and burnt 'townes, villages and castles, sparyng nothyn but religious houses and churches'.[5] The Scots refused to engage with their superior adversary, forcing the frustrated English soldiers to reluctantly retreat. The earl of Somerset provided thirty-nine men-at-arms and 160 archers for the campaign, which, although significantly more than many other nobles, were dwarfed by the earl of Northumberland's vast retinue of 320 men-at-arms and 1,500 archers. Thomas, still only a minor knight, was only able to muster five men-at-arms and twenty-four archers. The Beauforts, albeit increasingly prominent, had some catching up to do before they could rival the resources of the greatest magnates of the realm.[6]

On 16 September 1400, Glyn Dwˆr and his Welsh supporters launched their anticipated attack on Grey, torching the baron's estates and in effect declaring war on Henry IV. Lauded as Prince of Wales, Glyn Dwˆr's army swept through the Welsh countryside as the local uprising swiftly developed into a bitter national war of independence. A petty land dispute between two Anglo-Welsh lords had become a disastrous territorial war between Wales and England, the effects of which would be felt for generations.

When Henry was informed of the uprising, learning how the Welsh had 'broken out into rebellion and had seized many castles', he

‘gathered together the flower of his troops, and marched his array into north Wales’.[7] It was the second campaign in short succession on which the Beauforts accompanied their beleaguered half-brother, who marched his force from Shrewsbury around north Wales, a show of martial strength that accomplished little and failed to dampen the fiery resolve of the Welsh. For the Beauforts, however, it was another opportunity to prove themselves capable and to establish their position in close proximity to their sovereign.

Shortly after the expedition, Glyn Dwˆr was formally stripped of his lands and roundly denounced in England as a traitor. On 8 November 1400, the forfeited lands were awarded to Somerset, providing John, in theory, with a sizable landed estate across Wales. On the same day, the earl also received the lands of the recently deceased Robert Harrington, as well as the lands of Elizabeth, Lady Daudeley, another who had recently passed away.[8]

On 25 November, Somerset again benefitted from the treason of others when he was granted two beds, complete with furnishings and cushions, that had belonged to John Holland, earl of Huntingdon. Five days later another grant of two beds was recorded, although it is unclear if this related to the previous grant or was a separate gift. The second grant described the beds in detail, with one containing baudekin material embroidered with the arms of England while the second had three curtains of red sendal silk and ten red strips of tapestry. Also included were ten pillows of red cloth of gold, ten pillows of red velvet and ten pillows of white cloth of gold.[9] It was certainly a bed of the utmost luxury, and one wonders whether the earl installed it in one of his castles or manorial houses.

Thomas Beaufort also benefitted from the protracted fallout of the Epiphany Rising when on 10 February 1401 he was granted some costly cloth of Arras which had belonged to John de Montagu, the executed earl of Salisbury,[10] while on 21 July Thomas and his elder brother Somerset received some armour, originally belonging to Huntingdon, from John Swaledale of London by command of the king. Somerset was given a pair of plates and a pair of Milanese vambraces,

or forearm guards, while Thomas received two brigandines.[11]

The prosperity of the Beauforts continued into the second year of their half-brother's reign and was partly due to the relative inexperience and young age of others among the nobility. In 1401, the disinherited sons of those who had participated in the Epiphany Rising were young and posed little threat to the Beauforts' ascendancy. Huntingdon's son Thomas Holland was only six, while Salisbury's Thomas was around thirteen. Richard, heir of Thomas le Despenser, was five, and although Thomas de Mowbray's sixteen-year-old son did inherit the earldoms of Norfolk and Nottingham, he was not ready to assume a political role. Elsewhere, Thomas FitzAlan, earl of Arundel and earl of Surrey, was only twenty and Richard Beauchamp, 13th Earl of Warwick, was nineteen. It was a depleted nobility that allowed the Beauforts to flourish without any significant opposition. They were in the right place at the right time, and crucially had the right blood.

They were also recruited for diplomatic matters by the king. After the death of Richard II, the fate of his young widow Isabella, deposed as queen and void of status, was uncertain. Henry IV eventually negotiated her return to France, and John Beaufort was appointed to attend upon her during the transfer, acting as an official representative of the English crown. Somerset was assisted by Thomas Percy, earl of Worcester, the bishops of Hereford and Durham, and a vast retinue of knights, ladies, squires, pages and maids. The entourage departed England on 28 July 1401 and formally handed over Isabella to the French at Leulinghem, a small village south of Calais.[12]

Upon his return, Somerset received further grants in recognition of his sterling service. On 21 September, he was granted for life a house called 'la Tour, late of Alice de Wyndesore',[13] the scandalous mistress of the earl's grandfather Edward III and better known by her maiden name, Alice Perrers. La Tour was situated on the bank of the Thames and later came to be known as Coldharbour, a favoured residence of Somerset's granddaughter Margaret Beaufort. Further lands on Thames Street, close to the parish church of All-Hallows-the-Less and

which had belonged to the earl of Huntingdon, were also bestowed upon Beaufort. These grants afforded Somerset a substantial London base next to the bustling river, allowing ease of access to parliament and several of the king's palaces.

As the autumn of 1401 turned to winter, Glyn Dwˆr's army continued to set Wales ablaze as part of a war which, much to the consternation of the king, had shown no sign of dissipating. Adam of Usk reported how the Welsh leader, with 'all North Wales and Cardigan and Powis siding with him, sorely harried with fire and sword the English who dwelt in those parts', using their superior knowledge of the local terrain to remain elusive and unpredictable. An infuriated Henry retaliated by 'invading those parts with a strong power, utterly laying them to waste and ravaging them with fire, famine and sword, left them a desert, not even sparing children or churches'.[14]

Somerset, and probably his brother Thomas, accompanied his half-brother on this latest campaign to defend the Lancastrian crown, and may have been present in Llandovery marketplace on 9 October 1401 when a local landowner named Llywelyn ap Gruffydd Fychan was hanged, drawn and quartered by command of the king. Llywelyn was a supporter of Glyn Dwˆr and his grisly execution was conducted under the watchful eye of the king and his eldest son, Prince Henry. If either, or both, of the Beauforts were present, as seems likely, they would have endured Llywelyn's final, anguished screams as his entrails were ripped from his body. It was a barbaric act that did little to endear the English to the locals, but served as a brutal lesson to all looking on, including the Beauforts that disloyalty to the king invariably ended in death. It wasn't a wise path to follow, and the Beauforts had no intention of pursuing it.

*

After Somerset's return to England, November 1401 proved to be a particularly noteworthy month. On 1 November he was named captain of Calais, a significant military appointment which charged

him with protecting the English gateway to mainland Europe. As head of the king's largest permanent garrison and therefore capable of wielding significant military influence, the position could only be entrusted to a man whose loyalty was beyond reproach, and towards the end of 1401 John Beaufort was considered to be that man.

As captain, Somerset was required to hear any criminal or civilian pleas in the town and its surrounding villages and, if need be, sit in judgement on any unresolved disputes. He was also responsible for granting safe conducts to those intending to cross the Channel into England, including foreign ambassadors and envoys seeking an audience with his king. In effect, Somerset could control who came and who went to and from England. The most recent holder of the position had been John Holland, who, like John Beaufort, had been a half-brother to the king that appointed him, in his case Richard II. It was yet another instance in which a Beaufort had benefitted from the treason of a Holland.

On 16 November, meanwhile, the earl, who had been granted William Asthorpe's manors of Sampford Peverell and Aller Peverell in the spring, had his grant increased to include the reminder of Asthorpe's estate, owing to the Devon knight's illegitimacy.[15] Three days later, on 19 November, the earl received additional lands in west Wales that had been stripped from Welshmen who had subscribed to Glyn Dwˆr's thriving rebellion. The properties, located in the commotes of Iscoed and Gwinionydd in Cardiganshire, boosted Somerset's annual income by two hundred marks.[16]

If these grants were not ample demonstration of John Beaufort's standing with the king by the end of 1401, then any doubts were dispelled on 26 November when Henry stood godfather to Somerset's firstborn son, 'whom the king has this day raised from the font'. The newborn, christened Henry after the king, even received a hereditary annual grant of 1,000 marks, intended to provide for his needs until the king or his father could deliver further endowment.[17] To the medieval mind, it was imperative to baptise a baby shortly after birth, for a high infant mortality rate carried with it the unthinkable risk the

child would die outside the spiritual protection of the Church. The baptism was therefore interpreted as the process of liberating the young soul from sin, whether they survived or not. The service traditionally took place within close proximity to the birthplace, with the newborn presented for baptism by the chosen godparents, often friends or relatives of the parents. The precise location of young Henry's baptism is not noted, but the king's involvement in raising the child from the font, with the fact the patent was dated from Westminster, suggests it occurred either within the royal palace or perhaps the nearby abbey.

After this flurry of grants, the Beauforts appear to have had a subdued winter, perhaps celebrating Christmas with the king at Eltham Palace,[18] although on 14 February 1402 one of Thomas Beaufort's servants, James Strette, received a life grant of 3*d* from the petty custom of London for injuries suffered while in the king's service at Edinburgh, possibly during the August 1400 campaign. Thomas himself didn't receive his first grant of the year until 7 May, when he was given a life grant of six tuns of wine from the king's own personal cellar in Kingston-Upon-Hull.[19].

Somerset surfaced on 3 April when he was present at Eltham alongside the Percy earls of Northumberland and Worcester and the archbishop of Canterbury to witness the marriage by proxy of Joan of Navarre and Henry IV. Three weeks later, on 24 April, the earl was granted a licence to transfer some of his land in Devon to several churchmen, including his bishop brother, for them to hold on his behalf, known as enfeoffment. He also did the same for the lands he had gained from Owain Glyn Dwˆr.[20] His intentions are unclear as specific reasoning is not given in the deeds, but generally enfeoffment was used to bestow patronage from one person to another, sometimes in return for payment or a service. Did John Beaufort need some quick money to fund his lifestyle, or perhaps hope to gain a future favour from the Church?

During the summer of 1402, Somerset was tasked with escorting the king's daughter Blanche to Cologne for her marriage to Louis,

Count Palatine of the Rhine. Surviving records of the queen's remembrancer for the period 17 April to 26 July 1402 provide significant insight into the arduous journey conducted by the earl and his party. The entourage arrived in Colchester in time for the St George's Day celebrations on 23 April, where they dispensed alms to the poor before Mass was heard in the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary, part of the Benedictine St John's Abbey. By the 30th, the travelling party had decamped to Ipswich, twenty miles to the north-east, where Mass was this time heard in the Carmelite Priory, located in the centre of the town near the Butter Market.

On 6 June the group were again on the move, this time heading for Harwich before sailing across the sea to Brielle in Holland. Ten days later, they arrived in Dordrecht, where on 19 June the tired guests were entertained by the elderly count of Holland, Albert I, a first cousin of Somerset's father Gaunt as grandsons of William I, Count of Hainaut. This kinship may have been the reason for their lavish reception, with over 800 guests catered for amid exuberant celebrations. Suitably reinvigorated, and having acquired several vessels to transport their considerable cargo, the bridal party progressed up the River Waal from Holland, stopping at Nijmegen on the 24th, Cleves on the 26th and Büderich on the 28th.[21]

Finally arriving in Cologne on 30 June, Somerset observed the nuptials of his ten-year-old niece in the city's grand cathedral on 6 July, formally handing the young girl over to her new family and new life. The assignment had been another sign of trust in John from his king, and on 25 July he returned to England having satisfactorily fulfilled his duty.[22] After tending to his estates and settling any outstanding business, on 23 September 1402 Somerset was present in parliament to hear confirmation of the attainder of those involved in the Epiphany Rising, from which the Beauforts had already profited handsomely.

While the earl had been engaged overseas, his younger brother Henry Beaufort was forced to deal with growing disturbances in Oxford, a city he was acquainted with from his tenure there as a

student and chancellor. With the current chancellor Philip Repyngdon, the bishop of Lincoln was commissioned on 18 July to urgently enquire into reports that several Welshmen were dwelling in the city and unlawfully assembling at night, presumably intending to revolt in solidarity with their compatriots across the border.[23] It was Henry's duty to arrange for the capture and arrest of the offenders and ensure Oxford remained at peace. The last thing the king needed was one of his most important towns sacked from within. Whether the bishop personally intervened in the matter or merely delegated to his commissaries is unclear, but ultimate responsibility was his, as shown when he was deemed accountable for the escape of thirteen clerks from his prison at Newark in September, a lapse in security for which he was pardoned on the 8th.[24] The unease that permeated through the royal court was certainly keeping the Beauforts on their toes.

The Welsh were becoming a problem for the king throughout 1402, and on 15 August he responded by naming Thomas Beaufort captain of Ludlow Castle in the Welsh Marches, his first significant appointment.[25] Although a vital position during times of peace as the base from which large sections of Wales was governed, in the summer of 1402 the role of captain took on added importance as the explosive Welsh rebellion gathered pace.

On 22 June, Glyn Dwˆr's army had won a resounding victory over a humiliated English force at Bryn Glas in Powys, roughly twenty miles from Ludlow. The Englishmen had been led by Sir Edmund Mortimer and were outmanoeuvred by Glyn Dwˆr's cunning strategy of dividing his army, with one part based atop a steep hill and another obscured from view in a valley. Mortimer attempted to march his archers up the hill towards the Welshmen, but while their arrows fell woefully short, Welsh arrows relentlessly found their target. Either through exasperation or prior arrangement, part of Mortimer's army suddenly defected to their opposition, prompting the rest of his panic-stricken army to flee. Mortimer was humiliatingly captured, but when King Henry refused to pay his ransom, the twenty-five-year-old grandson of Lionel of Antwerp also defected, securing his new allegiance by marrying Glyn Dwˆr's daughter Catrin.

It was this series of disturbing events, the disastrous loss and the alarming defection of a loyal commander, that prompted Thomas Beaufort's appointment. The king needed somebody in the region in whom he could wholeheartedly trust, and who better to fulfil such a role than his eager half-brother. Intending to counter the threat of a combined Mortimer-Glyn Dwˆr alliance, Thomas was ordered to take up his position immediately. The king, meanwhile, 'with one hundred thousand men and more divided into three bodies, invaded Wales in war';[26] but, much like previous enterprises, this accomplished little and the Welsh rebels remained at large with their Mortimer ally in tow.

By 1403 the Beauforts had unquestionably established themselves as a core part of Henry IV's inner circle, devoted to his cause as the king struggled to maintain control of his crown. Henry recognised the necessity of ensuring his half-brothers were satisfied in their positions, while the Beauforts acknowledged those same positions were only held courtesy of the king's good grace. It was to the mutual benefit of both parties that this relationship remained in place for the foreseeable future.

Early in the new year, Somerset was again called upon by his half-brother to escort a royal bride to her new homeland, on this occasion to retrieve the king's new wife Joan of Navarre from Brittany to fulfil the marriage agreement contracted the previous year. The earl, accompanied by his brother Bishop Henry, had previously attempted to cross the Channel on 28 November 1402, but having departed Southampton they found themselves engulfed in a furious storm which left their ships stranded at sea for eleven days. Their ordeal came ended when they made landfall in Plymouth on 9 December, never having reached the Breton shore.[27] Commendably, the bishop wrote to the Council requesting the seamen who had attempted to take them across the water were still paid, despite the failure of the voyage.[28]

The second crossing attempt proved more successful, and the Beauforts arrived at Camaret-sur-Mer in early January. The small Breton port was situated on the Crozon peninsula across the bay from

Brest, and it was here the two brothers feasted with their new sister-in-law-in-waiting. It was reported that more than one hundred barrels of wine were purchased for the occasion at a cost of £384 16*s*, an astronomical figure charged to an already overburdened English exchequer.[29] It is unclear if such lavish expenditure caused the brothers to be reprimanded when they returned to court, or whether such revelries were endorsed by King Henry. Considering the growing financial problems in England, it seems likely that such carefree spending would not have gone unnoticed by those harbouring ill will towards the Beauforts and their rising prominence.

Perhaps with groggy heads, the Anglo-Breton party departed Camaret-sur-Mer on 13 January and arrived in Falmouth six days later. John and Henry Beaufort led the group towards Exeter where they were reunited with the king and his court, prompting further celebration as the groom came face to face with his intended bride. The wedding took place in Winchester Cathedral on 7 February and was officiated over by Henry Beaufort, who in his capacity as bishop of Lincoln deputised for the elderly bishop of Winchester, William of Wykeham. From the outset, King Henry had included his half-brothers in matters relating to his second marriage; the entire marital process had been one of the heart and with any number of nobles the king could have chosen to assist him, it was his father's other family that he turned to. This was not solely because of fraternal obligation on the part of the king, but rather because the Beauforts had already proved themselves the best men for the most delicate of tasks.

Somerset's activities on the Continent didn't end with the king's wedding. By April, plans were afoot for the earl, in his capacity as captain of Calais, to cross the Channel and assume personal command of the garrison. Consequently, on 5 April a directive was handed to John Brymbull, master of the king's ship *Godegrace de la Toure*, to recruit several mariners in preparation for Somerset's impending departure. By the first week of May he was in Calais, and on the 9th he was handed a commission to enquire into reports that a crayer called *La Marie of Lescluse*, 'laden with divers goods and merchandise of Rouen', was sailing to Normandy when it was driven ashore near

Calais by some Englishmen who subsequently hawked the goods.[30] Such incidents didn't reflect well on the authority of Somerset, nor his king, and the miscreants responsible were presumably punished.

Although the king had spent the first three years of his reign fending off enemies from within and without England, in the summer of 1403 the most serious threat yet was uncovered. The Percy family, headed by the earl of Northumberland and ably backed by his son Henry 'Hotspur' and brother Thomas, earl of Worcester, were aggrieved that lands and payments promised for their crucial support in 1399 had yet to materialise. The Percys were also dismayed by the favouritism recently shown to the king's brother-in-law Ralph Neville, earl of Westmorland, whose expansion into lands traditionally marshalled by their family was considered an affront to their honour.

After several attempts at imploring Henry IV to settle their debts and curb Westmorland's advancement, the Percys dramatically renounced their allegiance to the House of Lancaster, accusing the king of murdering the rightful sovereign Richard II, unjustly taxing the clergy and ungallantly refusing to pay ransom for Edmund Mortimer, Hotspur's brother-in-law. The Percys were also angered by the king's refusal to permit them to ransom the earl of Douglas, a wealthy Scottish noble they captured at the Battle of Homildon Hill in September 1402. The potential ransom represented substantial remuneration for the family, the denial of which proved to be an imprudent error of judgement.

Hotspur, so nicknamed by the Scots because of his unbridled enthusiasm to join battle, moved south from the family's base in Northumberland, intending to meet up with his uncle Worcester. Sensibly choosing to recruit the bulk of his army in Cheshire, an area heavily associated with Richard II and hostile to the Lancastrian regime, Hotspur set up camp near Shrewsbury. The king, having planned to march north in the belief he was to assist the Percys in their unrelenting campaign against the Scots, was informed of the uprising while in the Midlands and turned his army west to counter the new threat.

The two armies came face to face on 21 July 1403, marking the first time on English soil two forces with English archers squared off against one another. A notable casualty was Henry, the sixteen-year-old Prince of Wales, wounded in the face by a Percy arrow, which left the future king with a horrific scar. His father, meanwhile, perhaps contrary to any established rules of chivalry, arranged for decoys in the royal surcoat to take the field, for 'there fell two noble knights in the king's armour' who had been placed 'for the king's safety in the rear line of battle'.

Hotspur, acting with characteristic impetuousness and frustrated at killing imposter kings, led a charge straight into the heart of Prince Henry's retinue but, for reasons that are unclear, lifted his visor, at which point he was struck in the face with an arrow. Unlike the fortunate prince, Hotspur, the 'flower and glory of the chivalry of Christendom', was killed outright, bringing a 'most fearful battle' to an end.[31] The Percy heir was impaled on a spear in Shrewsbury marketplace before his corpse was quartered and his head was spiked on one of York's gateways. His uncle Worcester, meanwhile, was hanged, drawn and quartered.

Henry IV had come perilously close to losing both his throne and his son before that fateful arrow fell from the sky, but his decisiveness in facing the threat without hesitation was vindicated. Walsingham observed that 'on both sides men fell in great numbers' while 'many thousands fled from the place of battle', such was the ferocity of the action.[32] Henry subsequently ordered the construction of a chantry chapel to commemorate his great victory and to honour the dead.

There is no record of the Beauforts' presence on the battlefield, but considering Thomas Beaufort held a military post in Ludlow, just under thirty miles south, it seems likely he rallied to his half-brother's aid. For Thomas, as well as John and Henry, it was a period of deep concern. The Beauforts had entrenched themselves deep into the king's circle and relied heavily on the patronage of their kinsman. A life without Henry on the throne was hardly worth contemplating.

While the Percy threat had been neutralised, the war in Wales

continued to rage and Glyn Dwˆr meandered through the country laying siege to town after town. The Welshman wasted land around Brecon and devastated much of Carmarthenshire, attacking English garrisons at Dinefwr, Llandovery, Carreg Cennen, Dryslwyn, Emlyn, Llansteffan and Carew. The Welsh even caused severe damage to Carmarthen itself, the largest settlement in the region and the epicentre of English royal command in South Wales. Although Glyn Dwˆr's revolt had been prompted by a land dispute, he had nevertheless galvanised large numbers of his compatriots to rise in open rebellion. Such support effectively owed its origins to an innate hatred of oppressive English rule, taxation and law, habitually fuelled by the nationalistic fervour of the bards who espoused tales of past Welsh glories while prophesising of others yet to come.

On 28 September 1403, John Beaufort stepped into this treacherous world when he was appointed King's Lieutenant of South Wales, armed with full power to capture any Welsh rebels and seize their lands and goods for the crown. On the same day, the steward, mayor, bailiffs and ministers of Haverfordwest, Pembroke and Tenby were commanded to bring 'wheat-flour, bread, wine, ale and other victuals' to Carmarthen Castle where the earl and his men-at-arms, including Thomas Beaufort and their cousin Thomas Swynford, were residing. They were further requested to supply five tuns of ale on a weekly basis for a month and to provide stonecutters and carpenters to repair the castle and town. Furthermore, it was ordered that a ship resting in the port of Milford Haven should be seized and its stock of ten pipes of wine, ten pipes of honey and two pipes of salt should also be transported to Carmarthen and into the hands of Somerset.[33] It was clear the king intended his half-brothers to be well supplied for the arduous task ahead, which was to defeat Glyn Dwˆr and his uprising.

The Beaufort siblings were perhaps not prepared for the severity of the situation for they desperately appealed to the Council for assistance after only a week, even seeking to be relieved of their duties by a replacement garrison. The incumbent soldiers, demotivated and unpaid, threatened to down weapons and desert their posts unless they received their wages, and although a small sum

of money was dispatched to maintain the garrison until replacements could be mustered,[34] it was clear the posting was far more difficult than anticipated. By 12 November, the king's cousin Edward, duke of York, took over the post, and on 28 November Thomas Beaufort was redeployed and appointed King's Admiral of the Fleet, 'from the mouth of the Thames towards the north, with full power to hear complaints about things touching the office'.[35]

It was Henry Beaufort, however, who upstaged both his brothers when on 28 February 1403, two weeks after he officiated at the king's wedding, he was appointed Lord Chancellor,[36] one of the foremost offices in England and a position of considerable prestige. The chancellor was entrusted to perform multiple functions to aid the governance of the land, and therefore had to be a learned individual, with the ability to read and write, often resulting in the office being fulfilled by a churchman, as Henry was. The chancellor was, in effect, Keeper of the Great Seal, a royal chaplain and one of the most senior advisors to the king in spiritual and temporal matters. It was a momentous, even astonishing, appointment for a man yet to reach thirty. As his new position required his presence in London more often than not, on 17 August Henry was granted new lodgings by the king in Walthamstow and Old Stratford, both within convenient distance of Westminster, where the Council invariably met.[37]

The first three years of Henry IV's reign had been a period of gradual advancement for the Beauforts, tempered somewhat by the spectre of rebellion as danger seemingly lurked around every conceivable corner. The family had rallied to their half-brother's cause, for which they were well rewarded, and provided Henry retained his throne their position appeared unassailable. The foursome did, however, have ample reason to grieve during 1403, for on 10 May the family matriarch, Katherine Swynford, had died in Lincoln.

7

In Great Peril
1403–1406

The death of Katherine Swynford was a crushing blow to the Beauforts, who, unlike members of the established noble houses of England, perhaps did not possess that same sense of belonging to something far greater than themselves. While it is true they were part of an extended Lancastrian family, they could never be considered as Lancastrian as Henry IV or his sons, the true inheritors of John of Gaunt's lands and legacy. The Beauforts were, in effect, quasi-Lancastrians with a family name that could not compete with that of a Mortimer, a Mowbray or a Percy for prestige or status. Perhaps of particular concern to the Beauforts was the realisation that their links with the royal line would dissipate with each new generation. Was the death of Katherine, only four years after that of their father Gaunt, the moment that galvanised the Beauforts to focus on their own destiny, aware they could not always hope to stand in tandem with their Lancastrian kin?

Katherine had retired to Lincoln after Gaunt's death, where she became a tenant of the Priory in Minster Yard, observing the rise of her children from afar. Unsurprisingly, she chose to be buried in the city, with her obsequies taking place in a cathedral with which she had been intimately connected with throughout her adulthood. Although she was a Hainaulter by birth, Lincoln and its surrounding area had been home to Katherine since her marriage to Hugh Swynford around forty years earlier. Her grieving son Henry, as bishop of Lincoln, almost certainly took a prominent role in the proceedings.

Although she had ended her life as the wife of the richest duke in

the country, and not as the spouse of a Lincolnshire landowner, Katherine's Purbeck marble tomb was not particularly ostentatious, with her likeness captured on a brass plate rather than an opulent alabaster effigy. She was depicted on the plate in the mourning veil of a widow, which she was twice over, with her hands held together in prayer. The tomb itself originally stood under a stone canopy that featured her own coat of arms, three Katherine wheels on a red background, and those of Gaunt. A brass epitaph was inscribed in French and read:

> Here lies dame Katherine, duchess of Lancaster, third wife of the very noble and very gracious prince Duke John of Lancaster, son of the very noble King Edward III. The which Katherine died the tenth day of may the year of our grace 1403. On which our lord have mercy. Amen.[1]

As duchess of Lancaster, she had exhibited a dignity and poise at odds with her supposed scandalous reputation. Froissart considered her to have 'a perfect knowledge of court etiquette' and to have 'loved the duke of Lancaster and the children she had with him',[2] and it's a testament to her influence that the various family clans around her, namely the Beauforts, Chaucers, Swnyfords and Lancasters, remained on cordial terms with each other, having fostered healthy relationships void of animosity. While some clearly outranked others, all willingly served one another to their general advancement. Katherine, noted in records as 'the king's mother',[3] also cultivated a positive relationship with her stepson Henry IV, which only served to help the progression of her Beauforts.

Although earning the enmity of the chroniclers during her life, Katherine's reputation was salvaged somewhat eighty-two years after her death when her great-great-grandson Henry Tudor acceded to the throne. Gaunt's epitaph on his tomb in St Paul's Cathedral was updated and a Latin inscription concerning Katherine was added, reading:

> His third wife was Katherine, of a knightly family, and an exceptionally beautiful woman; they had numerous offspring, and from these came the maternal family of King Henry VII.[4]

Although losing both parents within four years may have been devastating, the Beauforts were pragmatic enough to realise they could not dwell on the situation for long. After carrying out the necessary religious observances and overcoming any personal grief, John, Henry and Thomas Beaufort were kept busy by their respective roles in the governance of their half-brother's unstable realm, while Joan continued to raise her children and hold court in the north as countess of Westmorland.

John had established his position as a capable and prudent military commander over the previous decade, utilising experience picked up in his youth travelling around Europe among some of the Continent's foremost knights. On 1 March 1404 the earl of Somerset was appointed to the Council, although he remained preoccupied with his responsibilities in Calais, for which he was assigned the Isle of Thanet in Kent on 18 April to help supply his household and garrison while across the Channel.[5] He also retained his position as King's Lieutenant in South Wales and was very much the king's chosen defender on the frontlines.

By the summer of 1404, Thomas, having gained some military experience as captain of Ludlow Castle, was given the rather different task of protecting the kingdom from the sea after he was appointed Admiral towards the North. It was to be the start of a lengthy service as one of the kingdom's foremost seafaring commanders of his day. On 13 June, Arnold Savage and Richard Merlawe were commissioned to take muster of Thomas's soldiers at Sandwich on the Kent coast and on 19 June he was given protection by the king for three months' service to ensure the 'safe custody of the sea'.[6]

Thomas was still in the post at the start of January 1405 when he was commissioned to enquire into reports that men of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Blakeney, Cley, Wiveton and Cromer in Norfolk were

involved in the criminal seizure of two Dutch merchant ships, one called *Marienknyght* and belonging to merchant named Isebrand Pierson, and another called *Godesghevade* owned by Peter Jonesson and John Berwoldesson. The two vessels, laden with unnamed goods from Prussia, were seized by the Englishmen and their crew of thirty-six men callously drowned in the sea. The goods were then peddled in various locations, including Scarborough. Such incidents were highly embarrassing to the king, keen to retain the friendship of the duke of Holland, and Thomas, as admiral, was charged with arresting the offenders and punishing them in accordance with English and maritime law.[7]

Henry Beaufort, meanwhile, had been raised to tirelessly serve the king with pen rather than sword, and was rewarded for his commendable zeal with the bishopric of Lincoln and the Lord Chancellorship, offices which gave him a seat on the Council alongside his brother Somerset and brother-in-law Westmorland.

As chancellor, Henry was tasked with opening parliament on 14 January 1404 in Westminster and 'very wisely and learnedly' put forward the delicate case of increased taxation to improve the defence of the realm. It wasn't an easy task for the bishop, who faced a hostile and uncooperative audience. As the king's mouthpiece, Henry passionately argued the royal case, stressing the multitude of threats that afflicted the country, internally and externally. After much tense negotiation, Henry secured a compromise of sorts; there would be another round of taxation, in return for a reduction in costs of the royal household and creation of a new council to ensure 'good and just governance' in future, one which would feature the two eldest Beauforts among its carefully selected contingent.[8] Perhaps hoping to mark a successful first parliament as chancellor, on 27 February Walter Devenish and Walter Hill were given protection by the king to travel to Ireland to procure fourteen goshawks and tercelets for the bishop.[9]

By the autumn, however, it became clear further funds were required and so the bishop was put in the awkward position of again

pleading with the Commons for more money. In the October 1404 parliament, held within St Mary's Priory in Coventry in the centre of the Lancastrian hegemony, Henry took a firmer position and made a direct request for further taxation on the very first day. Detecting some animosity among those he addressed, Henry pre-empted any protestations by declaring the commons 'ought not to marvel as to why the king had summoned his parliament after so brief an interval of time had passed since his last parliament' as it was evident the previous grant 'had not been as adequate as had been supposed at the time'. All other business was consequently set aside, and after another round of heated debate, when the precarious situation of the kingdom was emphasised, the chancellor finally secured what he was after; a grant would be provided by taxing the laity, along with a renewal of the wool subsidy and, perhaps most controversially, the levying of a 5 per cent income tax on all landed incomes worth more than 500 marks a year.[10]

Despite his young age, Henry was establishing a reputation as a capable administrator, an astute politician and a persuasive negotiator. The chancellorship wasn't a role where one could flourish by ancestry or connection alone. The office required a certain set of characteristics behind which lay a willingness for hard graft; between October 1404 and August 1405, for example, around 1,500 letters were issued using the Great Seal, while the bishop was present at forty-three council meetings.[11] Henry Beaufort clearly had his hands full conveying the king's orders.

There were rewards for such productiveness, however. In November 1404, Henry was translated to the bishopric of Winchester, the oldest and wealthiest diocese in the kingdom. The extent of the See was vast and comprised Hampshire, Surrey and the Isle of Wight. It was an ecclesiastic promotion, for the bishopric was accorded precedence above every other cleric in the country, save for the archbishops of York and Canterbury. Henry acquired a multitude of new residences with the position, plus several parks, hunting lodges and granges for his pleasure.

Of the properties he possessed for the next forty-three years, two in particular became synonymous with the new bishop, who was quickly becoming accustomed to the finer things in life. Wolvesey Palace in Winchester served as the administrative centre of the See and was situated only a few minutes' walk from the cathedral. The palace had been fortified in the mid-twelfth century by Henry of Blois, brother of King Stephen, and was renovated by Beaufort's predecessor William of Wykeham, who rebuilt the curtain walls and extensively remodelled the bishop's apartments. The twelfth-century East Hall, meanwhile, at eighty-eight feet was of sufficient magnificence to have hosted the elaborate wedding banquet of King Henry and Joan of Navarre the year before Bishop Beaufort's translation.

As a man firmly entrenched in the political sphere and intently focused on supporting the king in governing the realm, Bishop Beaufort spent a considerable amount of time preoccupied in London, where he was now afforded the use of Winchester Palace in Southwark. Activity centred around the resplendent Great Hall, which measured eighty feet in length and provided direct access to the bishop's private chambers on the east side. A noticeable feature of the hall was the Rose Window, an innovation of Bishop Wykeham, which vibrantly illuminated the room during feasts, particularly when sunlight shone through the colourful stained glass onto the assembled guests.

The palace also contained extensive domestic apartments for the bishop's retinue and any guests he hosted, while bountiful privy gardens, a fish pond and tennis courts were provided to entertain those in residence. Situated on the southern banks of the Thames, access to the river was via a wooden wharf, enabling the premises to be provisioned from overseas by boat. With an onsite butchery and brewery to supplement regular shipments of wine, the vaulted cellar beneath the hall was always well stocked with the bishop's favourite food and drink. Crucially for the bishop, often burdened by royal duty, Winchester Palace was only a short walk from London Bridge, allowing Henry easy foot access into the city if he chose not to take advantage of the waterway.

Although Henry's workload subsided when he resigned the chancellorship on 2 March 1405, the bishop had no intention of departing London for the more serene environs of his diocese, regardless of the splendour to be found in Farnham or Wolvesey. Although he had handed over the Great Seal, Henry had become accustomed to the rush of power, and having retained his seat on the Council he remained in the capital to serve both his and the king's interests. It was just as well; betrayal was rife once more.

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In February 1405, Owain Glyn Dwˆr, having reached the zenith of his campaign the previous summer when he was crowned Prince of Wales in Machynlleth, ratified his alliance with the Percy and Mortimer families by negotiating a three-way pact known as the Tripartite Indenture. The treaty, signed by Glyn Dwˆr, Edmund Mortimer and the earl of Northumberland, outlined their plan to divide England and Wales between them should they successfully overthrow Henry IV. The extraordinary document stipulated Glyn Dwˆr would receive Wales and parts of western England, while Northumberland would command the north. The Mortimers would rule London and the south of England. It may have seemed a far-fetched proposal but their threat to King Henry was very real, compounded not only by French involvement but also an uprising in northern England led by Northumberland and the archbishop of York, Richard Scrope.

Scrope was from a long-established Yorkshire family and was cousin of William Scrope, the earl of Wiltshire executed by Henry IV in 1399 during the latter's invasion of England. The prelate was well acquainted with the king, having announced the abdication of Richard II to parliament before escorting Bolingbroke to the throne. Even so, such familiarity did not preclude the archbishop rallying to the cause of the Percys and, by May 1405, he was joined by Thomas Mowbray, earl of Norfolk and son of the same duke of Norfolk banished from the kingdom in 1398 over his feud with Bolingbroke. Scrope and Norfolk held the king responsible for the downfalls of their kinsmen, and

revenge was sought. They soon mustered a respectable army and assembled outside York, where they were met by an opposing force commanded by Ralph Neville, earl of Westmorland.

The earl, eager to defend his brother-in-law's crown and with it the prospects of his Beaufort wife, persuaded the rebels to surrender, advising the pair their concerns would be sincerely considered by the king. It was a ruse. The two leaders were arrested and locked up in Pontefract Castle, the location of Richard II's death four years earlier. King Henry and Thomas Beaufort, recalled from sea, arrived at the castle on 3 June when an unseemly scuffle occurred between the archbishop and the king's impetuous half-brother. Scrope met the royal party defiantly clutching his crosier, at which point Thomas loudly admonished him, believing a traitor unworthy of brandishing a holy staff. Beaufort attempted to snatch the crosier away from the archbishop, only to be met with fierce resistance from the cleric who retorted that only the pope could revoke such a right.

The following day, Thomas was one of eight men appointed to hear the case of several York men accused of committing 'treasons, insurrections, rebellions and felonies',[12] while four days later, on 8 June, he formed part of a commission sitting in judgment on Scrope and Norfolk at the archbishop's own palace of Bishopthorpe, a few miles south of York.

The king had hitherto dealt with rebels and traitors with restrained mercy, and perhaps somewhat too timidly. This time was different, for Henry's patience had been pushed to the limit by the continuation of uprisings more than five years into his reign. He commanded both archbishop and earl be executed and the deed was duly done outside the York town walls that same day, probably in the presence of Thomas Beaufort.

Scrope's death earned the king the dubious honour of becoming the only English monarch to have authorised the killing of both an archbishop and a king, perhaps the greatest indication yet that Henry was determined to do whatever it took to secure his dynasty's future. Northumberland, meanwhile, had fled into Scotland and sought

sanctuary with his traditional enemy. Henry Percy had been given the benefit of the doubt two years ago after his son's actions at Shrewsbury, but this time he faced certain death once he fell into the king's hands.

On 27 June, King Henry made restitution to Westmorland and Joan Beaufort for the losses the couple incurred on their lands during Scrope's uprising. As part of the compensation process, several estates in Cumbria and Northumberland were granted to Henry Beaufort, who in turn transferred them for life to the Nevilles,[13] while on 20 July the king personally visited the earl and countess at Raby Castle for three days as part of his prolonged northern progress.[14] Of the king's other sisters, only Elizabeth remained in England, with Catalina and Philippa based abroad, and it seems likely he spent some time relishing the company of his youngest sister Joan. If the king's close relationship with the three Beaufort males is anything to go by, then it can be presumed the king and Joan shared a similar connection.

Although one major revolt had been crushed, the king's worries were exacerbated when a French army landed in west Wales at the end of the summer to reinforce Glyn Dwˆr's campaign. Although their support eventually floundered before they faced the English in battle, it was nonetheless a perilous period of uncertainty for the Lancastrian affinity, struggling to swim against a tide of rebellion. Even before they entered Wales, the French had proved particularly troublesome around Calais, where John Beaufort had the unenviable task of defending his territory from a joint Franco-Burgundian force.

In May 1405, Marck, a small English possession near Calais, was besieged by an army of 2,000 soldiers led by Waleran de Luxembourg, count of Ligny and St Pol. After a terrifying onslaught, Somerset's seasoned troops rallied and fended off Luxembourg's men. The Calais garrison, having emerged from the town to relieve Marck, tricked the French by approaching their ranks under the pretence of peace, bearing wine and other provisions. Upon reaching their unsuspecting adversaries, the English suddenly unleashed a torrent of arrows, causing many casualties and forcing Luxembourg's men to flee.

Several of the leading French commanders were killed, and around sixty to eighty knights were taken prisoner. Emboldened by their success, Somerset's men marched out of Calais three days later to besiege the town of Ardres using the equipment they had captured from the French at Marck against the Ardrésiens. Their determined attempt ultimately proved in vain, and the English soon retreated into Calais, their spirits nonetheless undampened.[15]

The counter-attack at Marck was portrayed as a great tactical victory in England with the king proudly informing the archbishop of Canterbury on 21 May of his half-brother's success. Henry ordered the prelate to offer thanksgivings to God, emphasising the 'great peril' to which he had recently been exposed and reflecting 'upon the unmerited benefits he has received since he took upon him the governance of the realm'. The king also implored the archbishop and his 'men of religion' to pray for Somerset's men who 'put to flight' the French 'to the no small honour of those lieges and of the king and realm'.[16]

That the beleaguered captain of Calais succeeded in repelling the attack, defending a vulnerable outpost despite crippling financial difficulties, only served to enhance his credibility as one of England's leading military commanders. During the January 1404 parliament, Somerset had passionately petitioned the king to release funds for Calais, arguing that the 'very great misfortune, necessity and poverty into which the soldiers had sunk' was directly because of non-payment of wages. Somerset complained that he had, 'several times before now', raised the subject with the king, not only by letters but also face to face. Henry's response to this very public appeal was to announce a prompt payment of all wages owed, and to ensure future wages were honoured on time.[17]

Sure enough, on 25 August 1404, Somerset received a payment of 5,000 marks to cover the wages of himself and his men, but this was hardly sufficient to sustain such a sizable garrison for long.[18] Despite the king's promise, the royal coffers had been all but emptied by fending off rebellion after rebellion and this had a significant impact

on the earl's ability to protect Calais. That he succeeded in maintaining the garrison, upholding the defence of England and preventing his demoralised soldiers from downing weapons and deserting their post despite lack of food and military provisions, is a testament to his skill as a leader of men.

King Henry, aware of the perilous situation into which he had put his half-brother, endeavoured to reimburse Somerset through other means. On 15 February 1405, the earl received several forestry grants from Henry, including the wardenship of the forests of Clarendon, Buckholt and Melchet in Hampshire, and Grovely Wood in Wiltshire.[19] Although the small revenue the woodlands produced was welcomed, Somerset's situation in Calais remained desperate throughout the remainder of the year. On 6 October, he solemnly informed the king that some villagers of Gosford and Bawdsey in Suffolk had been captured by the French, who destroyed some English ships in the process. The villagers had been tasked with supplying the garrison with food and ale, and their seizure caused Calais to quickly fall short of provisions.

The king appealed to his citizens for urgent aid, imploring anyone with a ship to take a wide range of goods across the Channel, including 'bread, wine, ale, wheat, oats, arrows, bows, wood, timber, boards, iron, animals, flesh and salt'.[20] That no customs tax was payable on any shipments emphasised the severity of the situation; the king had no desire to make a profit from the appeal, he just needed his half-brother's garrison restocked as soon as possible. It took all of John Beaufort's military expertise to sustain English Calais, and one wonders what toll the events of 1405 took on the earl's health, both physically and mentally.

Thomas Beaufort was faring better than his elder brother. On 4 June 1405, he was rewarded for his role in bringing Scrope to justice when temporarily appointed Marshal of England in place of his brother-in-law Westmorland, the highest honour of his career to date.[21] It was anticipated that while the Neville earl was preoccupied protecting the Scottish border and dealing with the remaining vestiges

of the Percy rebellion, Thomas was more than capable as understudy, tasked with overseeing the maintenance and discipline of the king's retained knights and dispensing justice in military matters.

Thomas was further rewarded on 7 October when he was granted some property forfeited by Thomas, 5th Baron Bardolf, who had fled with Northumberland into exile. The grant included the honour and manor of Wormegay, as well as the manors of Stow Bardolph, North Runcton and Fincham,[22] providing Thomas with a small network of holdings in west Norfolk. Bishop Beaufort also benefitted from the Scrope rebellion, receiving several goods to the value of 100 marks that had been stripped from the disgraced earl of Norfolk.[23] It was becoming a recurring theme of Henry IV's reign that when others were punished for their treason, it was the Beauforts who were invariably rewarded for their loyalty.

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In 1406 the tide began to turn for the king in Wales, where his eldest son Henry had recently assumed control of the military campaign, systematically breaking down Welsh resistance until the rebellion was on the verge of collapse. Within a few years, Glyn Dwˆr's position was so diminished he fled into the mountains, never to surface again. As a consequence, any lingering concern over the possibility of Edmund Mortimer, Glyn Dwˆr's son-in-law and uncle to the earl of March, deposing Henry started to recede. The threat from Scotland also subsided when the English fortuitously came into possession of Prince James in March 1406 after the young Scottish heir was captured off the English northern coast on the way to France. Only two weeks later, the child's father Robert III passed away and the twelve-year-old prisoner acceded in name, if not person, to the Scottish throne. It was a momentous coup for Henry IV and provided much-needed respite in the north.

Far from being a kingdom at peace, however, external threats were merely supplanted by internal strife, as the Prince of Wales decided it was time he abandoned the battlefield to explore the more refined, if

equally treacherous, world of politics. Having spent much of his adolescence serving in the Welsh wars, Prince Henry had grown confident, ambitious and impatient, developing a thirst for combat and the glories that came with it. It had been a strenuous education, but there seemed little doubt the prince had matured into a natural leader of men. This domineering force now stalked the corridors of Westminster, eager to learn the ropes of governance. Conflict with the old guard was inevitable.

In anticipation of this new phase in the prince's life, protracted negotiations had taken place in March 1406 about young Henry's marital prospects, and it was his namesake Beaufort uncle who was charged with travelling to France to secure a peace treaty by proposing a union with one of Charles VI's daughters. With the two eldest Valois princesses having already been wed and the third entering a convent, the choice of bride was between Michelle and Katherine. Accompanying Bishop Beaufort across the Channel was Thomas, 1st Baron de Camoys; John Catterick, treasurer of Lincoln Cathedral; and John de Norbury, captain of Guînes.[24] Although the English contingent were treated as honoured guests of the French, their quest was unproductive. The expedition did, however, formally introduce the thirty-one-year-old bishop to the French as a figure of growing importance, entrusted with handling the most sensitive of assignments. Both parties would become well acquainted over the next forty years.

If the prince was despondent at his uncle's failure to secure a bride, he kept himself occupied with establishing his position at court, quickly learning it was now his words that would win his battles, not his trusted sword. The king's finances were again in disarray, and parliament resolved to finally rein in the spiralling debt, deliberating for much of 1406 on how to lower such vast expenditure while settling many of the loans the king owed. On 12 August, one such loan was partially repaid when £600 was returned to Bishop Beaufort.[25]

If King Henry felt such intervention was an affront to his regal dignity, he had little choice but to acquiesce. Accusations of financial

maladministration were widespread, and the issue had to be urgently addressed. By the end of the 1406 parliament, a new council was formed to rule in the king's stead while he recovered from illness. It was led by the eager Prince Henry. Other members of the council included Thomas Arundel, archbishop of Canterbury; Edward, duke of York; Nicholas Bubwith, bishop of London; and Chancellor Thomas Langley, bishop of Durham. Also appointed were John and Henry Beaufort.

Together, the councillors were tasked with re-establishing good governance in a kingdom ravaged by insurrection and financial catastrophe. It was an unenviable responsibility for the Beauforts, aware that failure to return the crown to solvency could conceivably ruin of their beleaguered half-brother. Pressure notwithstanding, both men presumably relished the opportunity to again prove their worth to their peers, a consequence of their proud Lancastrian breeding and striving ambition.

The Council's first meeting was held on 8 December 1406, with the prince, Archbishop Arundel, Bishop Langley, the duke of York and the earl of Somerset in attendance.[26] The cost-cutting decision was taken that the king should withdraw from London after Christmas to one of his country estates, a bold decision that highlighted the Council's earnest intention to enforce austerity on the royal household. Any extra finance raised was to be diverted to matters of defence, a practical policy considering recent attacks on the crown. Somerset presumably had much to say on the subject considering his experience in Calais, and secured a payment of £8,586 for the wages of the Calais garrison, with confirmation of his position as captain for another six years.[27]

Although Thomas Beaufort had yet to advance to level of his brothers, he wasn't exempt from royal patronage. On 28 September 1406 he was granted the keeping of the castle and lordship of Wigmore in the Welsh Marches,[28] a high-profile former Mortimer residence situated around eight miles west of Ludlow Castle, where Thomas was already captain. After the treachery of Edmund Mortimer

it was imperative that the king had somebody he could trust overseeing the region, and who better than his half-brother? In the long term, Thomas's short tenure in the area would hold him in good stead; he formed a close bond with several soldiers making their way in the world, including Prince Henry and the lords Warwick, Audley, Talbot, Grey and Charleton, all of whom would play significant roles in the prince's French campaigns a decade later.

The end of 1406 brought the death of the Castilian brother-in-law of Henry IV and the Beauforts, Enrique III, whose passing on 25 December led to the accession of their nephew Juan, the nine-month-old son of Catherine of Lancaster. The Beauforts' thoughts on the matter are not recorded, and it is unclear whether they had much interaction with their half-sister, but some form of condolence was probably dispatched to Spain. Any positive feelings for their half-sister were almost certainly not reciprocated, for the Beauforts would always be the children of the woman Catherine's father took as mistress while married to her mother Constance.

The deaths of the kings of Castile and Scotland highlighted the mortality of royal princes, a concern that plagued the mind of Henry IV throughout the year. With four strong and healthy sons headed by the indomitable Prince of Wales, the Lancastrian succession was secure. The king nonetheless felt compelled to petition parliament for formal recognition of his sons' rights, partly prompted by the worrying revelation of an abduction attempt on the Mortimer children in February 1405, masterminded by the king's cousin Constance of York. When the plan was foiled, Constance, who maintained a grudge against the king for her husband Thomas le Despenser's death during the Epiphany Rising, deflected blame to her brother, Edward, duke of York. Although the claim was never verified, both siblings of York found themselves unceremoniously imprisoned by a nervy king unwilling to take any chances. It wouldn't be the last time York would conspire against Lancaster.

On 7 June 1406, an Act of Parliament was passed confirming Prince Henry as his father's heir, with the provision that should the

prince die without male issue then any daughter of his would not be permitted to inherit the crown. Instead the succession was entailed in the male line only, with the crown passing sideways from Prince Henry to his brother Thomas. The reasoning was sound; a strong adult male was required to protect the Lancastrian inheritance, and Thomas was proving more than capable as back up. The Act was also a retrospective vindication of how Henry IV had claimed the throne, having usurped the claim of the Mortimers by virtue of his male-line descent. The Act barely survived six months before it was amended in December, with the succession reverting to the offspring of Prince Henry, regardless of gender.[29] Had the prince, now in a position of authority as a member of the Council, voiced his disapproval of the potential disinheritance of a hypothetical daughter?

The king's preoccupation with the succession throughout 1406 also impacted his Beaufort half-siblings. If the Mortimers were considered a viable alternative to Lancastrian rule, then what about the Beauforts? It would not have escaped Henry's notice that John Beaufort had several male heirs with Margaret Holland, children descended from kings of England on both sides of their family. Was it possible these children would grow into rivals of the king's own offspring and one day strive for the throne? The Beauforts and the Lancastrians may have been intimately connected for the time being, bonded by the personal kinship between Henry IV and his half-siblings, but it was not certain this relationship would endure in future generations as the blood connection faded.

The king, or perhaps someone acting surreptitiously on his behalf, was not taking any risks. In 1397 the Beauforts had been wholly legitimised by an Act of Parliament, which stated the family had the right 'to be raised, promoted, elected, assume, and be admitted to all honours, dignities, pre-eminences, estates, degrees and offices'. There was about to be a very important adjustment to that Act that would come to define the Beauforts' status for much of the fifteenth century.

8

Except to the Royal Dignity 1407–1410

As Henry IV approached forty, it was becoming evident this proud prince was a mere shadow of his former self, with illness and disease ravaging his once sturdy warrior's body. His gaunt, bedridden figure shocked those who visited him, and it was not anticipated he would survive much longer. Plans had been put in place for the succession, and hands-on rule was already gradually transferring to Prince Henry, who had started to dominate council proceedings. With the status of the prince and his three Lancastrian brothers settled by the Acts of the previous year, early in 1407 attention turned to the Beauforts and their own ambiguous place in the succession.

The instigation for this review of their status stemmed from a request by John Beaufort, who petitioned the king to reconfirm the legitimacy his half-siblings had been granted under Richard II. On 10 February 1407 the earl of Somerset was duly accommodated at Westminster, and the original Act of a decade earlier was confirmed:

> Exemplification, at the request of the king's brother John, earl of Somerset, of the tenour of the enrolment of letters patent dated 9 February, 20 Richard II, legitimating John, Henry, Thomas and Joan Beauford, children of John, duke of Lancaster.[1]

There was a crucial caveat to this attestation however, for three simple words had been added to the original Act, squeezed clumsily into the existing text – *excepta dignitate regali*, or 'except to the royal dignity'. The interlineation appeared after the word 'dignities' and

before ‘pre-eminences’, altering the Latin text to read that the Beauforts could be ‘raised, promoted, elected, assume, and be admitted to all honours, dignities, *except to the royal dignity*, pre-eminences, estates, degrees and offices public and private whatsoever’. The inference was clear; the family were entitled to inherit or obtain any office in the kingdom, with the specific exception of one: the throne itself.

What prompted this exemption? Did the king fear his half-brothers, or their descendants, would one day lay claim to a crown he had understandably earmarked for his own issue? Could this addition be evidence Henry did not fully trust the Beauforts, regardless of the unwavering loyalty they had exhibited? Or was it included at the discretion of a scheming third party attempting to curb the family’s ambitions, such as the archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Arundel, shortly to fall foul of the Beaufort brothers?

It’s unlikely the king had suddenly developed doubts about the Beauforts’ allegiance to the House of Lancaster, and there is no evidence of any obvious breach. Henry had depended on his half-siblings’ service over the previous seven years, and although he had survived rebellions, parliamentary criticism, near bankruptcy and repeated bouts of sickness, the one constant had been the faithfulness of his brothers. Providing no third party was involved, the most rational explanation is that the king was simply adding a further protective barrier around his four sons, having grown apprehensive about their ability to retain the throne after his death. The series of rebellions had only served to exacerbate such anxiety.

That the Beauforts ever held hopes of inheriting the throne seems highly improbable when one considers the four Lancastrian princes ahead of them in the line of succession, not to mention any children their nephews subsequently had. If anything, the codicil to the Act seems to be nothing more than an increasingly ill king tying up loose ends. If it wasn’t for later events in 1485, and the accession of a Beaufort heir in Henry Tudor, then the exemption would have long been disregarded by historians as of minor importance.

Whatever prompted the interlineation, it's questionable whether the curious addition was, in fact, legally acceptable. The original petition had been ratified by an Act of Parliament in 1397 and was therefore a legally binding document. Any alterations to the Act could only be made if parliament repealed the previous bill or endorsed those changes. Although Tudor later claimed the throne by emphasising his Beaufort descent from Edward III, hostile commentators have often pointed out his maternal ancestors were barred from the throne. The truth is the exemption was *never* sanctioned by parliament and was, therefore, merely the will of a king rather than law. If one king could add such an amendment, then another could simply remove it. The original Act of 1397, which categorically stipulated, with parliamentary assent, that the Beauforts could be raised or promoted to all and any office in the land, remained enshrined in law until the day Henry Tudor became king.

Regardless of any debate over their status in early 1407, the Beauforts' presence at the heart of the Lancastrian affinity remained unaffected. In fact, as their half-brother entered the twilight of his reign, their support had never been as vital. King Henry may not have wanted the Beauforts to inherit the crown themselves but he needed them, as his most faithful servants, to help safeguard that same crown for his sons and they remained close, figuratively and literally, to the king.

On 24 January 1407, a 'grete fest' was celebrated at Bishop Beaufort's Winchester Palace in Southwark to celebrate the wedding of Edmund Holland, 4th Earl of Kent, to Lucia Visconti, daughter of Bernabò, lord of Milan.[2] The marriage had taken place in the nearby Augustinian priory of St Mary Overie and the bride was given away by the king, to whom she had once been touted as a possible wife in his younger days. The groom was well known to the Beauforts, which may have been a consideration in the location of the banquet, as Holland was the brother of Somerset's countess Margaret. Holland had succeeded his brother Thomas as earl of Kent after the latter was executed following the Epiphany Rising in 1400, and although the Beauforts had profited handsomely from the 3rd Earl's treason, any

animosity between Edmund and the family of his sister's husband is not apparent.

On 30 January, a week after the wedding celebrations, John and Henry Beaufort remained in the presence of the king and prince when they witnessed Thomas Langley, bishop of Durham, resign the chancellorship near the entrance of St Mary de la Puwe, a small chapel that formed part of St Stephen's Church in the Palace of Westminster. Langley's replacement was the archbishop of Canterbury, with whom the Beauforts were increasingly on poor terms.[3]

On 27 April, 'with the assent of the king's council', on which served his two elder brothers, Thomas Beaufort was granted the town of Dunwich in Suffolk for a period of twenty years,[4] while on 12 August he was requested to temporarily fill the office of Constable of England in the absence of his young nephew Prince John, who was occupied in the north.[5] Although Thomas may have been the beneficiary of his brothers' influence on the Council, the youngest Beaufort was clearly developing into a solder of the utmost quality. That he had been selected to step in temporarily as constable, having already temporarily held the position of marshal, is testament to this. If the present post-holder had not been a son of the king, then the office may even have belonged fully to Thomas. If John was the nobleman and Henry the politician, then Thomas was unquestionably the soldier of the family.

On 7 May, it was Somerset's turn to benefit from the continuing benevolence of king and council when he was granted the constableship of Corfe Castle in Dorset.[6] The formidable fortress, built on a steep chalk promontory on the edge of the Purbeck Hills, was an extensive royal palace that quickly became one of the earl's favourite residences. Although a Saxon fort had long existed on the site, the first stone castle was constructed in the late eleventh century during the reign of William the Conqueror and was notable as the location in which King John stored his royal treasure and regalia during his troublesome reign. In the early fourteenth century, Corfe gained

further notoriety when Somerset's great-grandfather Edward II was imprisoned within the secure confines of the castle, part of the king's ongoing conflict with his estranged wife Isabella and her lover Roger Mortimer.

By the time Somerset came into possession of Corfe, it had undergone a steady transformation from impenetrable fortress into palatial retreat. The castle was entered by crossing a bridge over a deep ditch and passing through a two-storey outer gatehouse, and each time the earl visited Corfe he could not have failed to notice the intimidating arrow loops, the rattling portcullis or the multitude of murder holes that littered the gateway, the first of many lines of defence intended to protect the inhabitants in the event of an attack. Striding purposely along the outer walls were members of Somerset's garrison, maintaining a watchful eye on all comings and goings from their vantage point, including that of the earl's retinue. In a troublesome reign of war and rebellion, Somerset must have been reassured by the protection Corfe could provide for his family.

The outer bailey, occupied by stables, storehouses and workshops, was generally bustling with frenzied activity and protected on all sides by a collection of towers, four on the western side and two on the east. The inner ward, the heart of the castle, entered through another gatehouse and drawbridge, provided access to the soaring Keep, erected in 1105 by Henry I and one of the earliest of its kind in England. Somerset was able to make significant use of the Great Hall, the King's Chambers and the Chapel, while across an intimate courtyard stood King John's *Gloriette*, a highly decorated and ostentatious chamber that provided Somerset another elegant room in which to entertain his guests with a myriad of banquets, dances and plays.

Pleasure and relaxation apart, the reason Corfe Castle was granted to John Beaufort was to ensure south-west England was adequately defended in the event of an invasion anywhere along the lengthy coastline. As constable, his role was to be chief administrator of all business conducted at the castle, ensuring the garrison and armoury

were well provisioned and that the defences were in full working order, although in reality he had several subordinates to carry out his orders. As it transpired, a raid on England did occur at the start of 1408, but it came from the north.

Henry Percy, the exiled earl of Northumberland, launched a desperate final assault early in the year, invading with a small army from his base in Scotland. Accompanied by Lord Bardolf, who wanted to recover the Norfolk estates he had partially lost to Thomas Beaufort, by 19 February they had reached Bramham Moor, a few miles south of Wetherby in Yorkshire, where their disparate force was met, and defeated, by a royal army led by Sir Thomas Rokeby. Northumberland was killed, decisively ending the Percys' five-year rebellion and strengthening the position of the Beaufort-Nevilles as northern England's foremost family.

Leaving his young family at Corfe, by July 1408 Somerset had returned to Calais to assess the current situation in person and he must have been alarmed to find his garrison insufficiently manned. It soon transpired some of his soldiers had led a raid into the Picard countryside to seize much-needed supplies from the local communities. It was a calamitous error of judgement as the rash Englishmen were soon surrounded by a larger and ominously well-armed French force. Luckily, their intuitive Beaufort captain rode to their rescue, having gathered up their wives in Calais and marched them purposefully in battle formation through the same countryside in search of their men. Whether the women were armed or not is unclear, but the French force scarpered at the sight of what they could only assume was a hardy relief unit of battle-tested male soldiers. It was an act of ingenuity under pressure by Somerset, if risky, and further vindicated his suitability in defending the perilous English gateway to France.[7]

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In February 1409, the Lancastrian regime received the welcome news that Harlech Castle, the last significant bastion of Welsh resistance,

had fallen into English hands, with Edmund Mortimer, the renegade uncle of the earl of March, killed during the latter stages of the siege. With the combined threat of Glyn Dwˆr, Mortimer and Percy nullified, the king of Scotland imprisoned and the French preoccupied with their own internal issues, 1409 proved to be unusually calm for the overburdened Beauforts after a decade of strife.

In July, Somerset took the opportunity to demonstrate his martial capabilities on English soil when he competed in a tournament against Jean de Werchin, the seneschal of Hainault who had issued an open challenge to Henry IV to fight some of his finest knights. The king accepted, and his half-brother was put forward as a participant against Werchin, a compatriot of Somerset's mother Katherine Swynford. The Queen's Wardrobe Accounts show that a timber scaffold covered in canvas and worsted wool was erected next to St Bartholomew's Hospital in Smithfield, draped in pieces of arras and gold cloth. The royal tent, suggesting the king was in attendance, was covered with luxurious Cypriot silk cloth.[8]

As a high-status member of the nobility, Somerset's horse was not only well groomed and powerfully built, but covered with a caparison bearing his heraldic emblems. One imagines that the Beaufort portcullis featured prominently, along with the Lancastrian livery colours of blue and white that the earl was entitled to use as a legitimate son of John of Gaunt. With no expense spared, the tournament was a major state occasion and captured the attentions of the commons and the chroniclers. English pride was at stake and, in particular, in the hands of John Beaufort.

The competition featured an array of martial disciplines, including the popular joust, contested between eight knights on each side. The earl, who fought 'manfully yn al his chalanges and put his adversari to the worsse yn alle poyntis', competed with such skill he 'wanne hym there grete worschyp and degre of the ffeelde'. After six more days of competition, the king honoured the courageous participants, many of whom were knighted for their efforts, with a 'grete ffeest' at which he presented the competitors with unspecified rich gifts.[9] Somerset

emerged from the proceedings with his martial reputation, carefully developed over the previous two decades, considerably enhanced. He also ensured England's chivalric standing in Europe had not been tarnished, a matter of great importance to a usurper king still struggling to earn respect overseas. More than anything for Somerset, on a personal level, he had probably delighted his half-brother.

The earl's impressive performance was not his first in such an environment, for he had competed in the famed St Inglevert joust nineteen years earlier. Somerset probably contested numerous unrecorded challenges during the intervening period, each of which, by their nature, was a life-threatening exercise. John's great-great-grandson Henry VIII was an infamous victim of the joust when he fell from his horse in 1536, suffering a debilitating leg injury and concussion that may have precipitated his decline into tyranny, while in 1559 Henry II of France was killed when a splinter from the lance of his opponent pierced his eye.

To prosper in this dangerous activity, which the term 'sport' does no justice, the participant had to be both resilient in body and confident in mind. It was imperative he was a competent horseman, capable of riding while weighed down with armour and wielding a lance. To charge at speeds of up to forty miles per hour, seated precariously on the back of a thundering warhorse, required a physical and mental toughness that few men possessed. The courageous Somerset had proved to be one such man, capably following in the footsteps of his half-brother Henry IV, widely regarded as one of Europe's foremost practitioners of the joust in his younger days. It was a mutual hobby that helped solidify the considerable lifelong bond between the two men.

While his brother was earning plaudits in the joust, on 16 July 1409 a pardon was issued to Thomas Beaufort for his 'debts, accounts, arrears, fines, issues, amereements, actions and goods',[10] which would have been routine for a man shortly expected to leave England for on 27 July, Thomas was confirmed as Admiral of the Fleet to the North and West, taking on additional responsibility for the ports of Ireland,

Aquitaine and Picardy.[11] It was an all-encompassing appointment that handed Thomas considerable influence over the English fleet and any maritime issues, a precursor to the position of Lord High Admiral, created a few years later. In light of any noble title, it also gave the youngest Beaufort a palpable identity, that of the kingdom's senior naval officer.

A few weeks later, on 16 August, the admiral was commissioned to hear the case of four men from Morlaix in Brittany who claimed that a small English vessel, 'armed and arrayed in a manner of war', attacked and robbed the Bretons of their cargo. The petitioners, John Beesake, Reymond Martyn, William Reymonde and Alan le Bourne, complained that their ship *Seint Johan* lost its substantial load, including 104,000 mackerel, to the value of 2,000 gold crowns.[12] It was a sensitive case to handle as the attack on the Bretons was contrary to the truce that existed between England and the duke of Brittany, and Thomas was empowered to make restitution to the wronged party – providing he found in their favour, which isn't recorded. To prosper in the role, the admiral had to be a figure of meticulous temperament and a wily negotiator capable of quelling any potentially troublesome cross-channel disputes before they escalated out of control. It was a vitally important, if stressful, position, but Thomas Beaufort doesn't seem to have encountered any issues in carrying out his duties.

Towards the end of 1409, the Beauforts became increasingly embroiled in political intrigue and faction rivalry. The brothers were increasingly conspicuous, physically and ideologically, at the side of their vigorous young nephew Prince Henry who was intent on controlling England's governance while his father struggled with illness. It was an astute move; young Henry represented the future and it would do no harm to the long-term prospects of the Beauforts to ally themselves with the prince before he inherited the crown.

There is no suggestion the Beauforts had, or were planning to, turn their back on their royal half-brother, but the king was showing no signs of recovering from his lingering illness. The fact he had drafted a will in 1409 only compounded fears he didn't have long to live, and

the Beauforts chose to hedge their bets on the prince becoming king sooner rather than later. The man who stood in the way of the prince and the Beauforts achieving complete control of the Council was Thomas Arundel, archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Chancellor, and crucially the king's long-serving confidant.

It's tantalising to suggest that any breach in relations between Arundel and the Beauforts may have had its origins in the archbishop's role in the codicil added to their act of legitimisation a few years earlier. Is it possible the Beauforts weren't satisfied with the addition and, rather than blaming the king, levelled their frustration at Arundel, the chancellor who oversaw the amendment? It's likely the archbishop did not approve of Henry Beaufort's worldly nature, and certainly did not appreciate the role played by Thomas Beaufort in the downfall of his fellow churchman Archbishop Scrope in 1405. More than any mitigating factor, however, the conflict between Arundel and the Beauforts was an age-old struggle for power, with an ambitious younger party seeking to supplant the established order.

The prince and his uncles achieved their aim when, faced with such formidable and united opposition, the frustrated archbishop resigned the chancellorship at the end of December 1409, allowing Prince Henry to assume charge of the Council, and with it control of the kingdom. Although no replacement as chancellor was appointed over the Christmas period, the office was finally filled on 31 January 1410 when Thomas Beaufort was chosen, the second Beaufort to hold the post after Henry's tenure between 1403 and 1405. The ceremony was held in the 'Parlement Chambre' of Arundel's Lambeth Palace, with Thomas receiving the Great Seal 'in the accustomed manner' from the king in the presence of the Prince of Wales and the archbishops of Canterbury and York, among other unnamed observers.[13] The prince's coup, backed by his Beaufort uncles, was complete.

The chancellorship was a lucrative, if demanding, role that propelled Thomas to the forefront of governance and, for the first time, he could claim to be on par with his brothers, both of whom had

already wielded substantial influence during Henry IV's reign. Considering Thomas's close association with the prince, and lack of any ecclesiastical or noble credentials, it's likely the heir to the throne was partly responsible for the unexpected appointment. It's also probable Thomas was preferred to the more obvious choice of his brother Henry as there was rising anticlerical sentiment emerging among the commons, discontented with members of the clergy considered more worldly than spiritual. Henry Beaufort was perhaps not the most prudent choice to be chancellor at this juncture.

The last non-churchman to fill the post was Michael de la Pole, who was at least a baron when appointed in 1383. The last appointee without any noble title was the lawyer Sir John Knyvet in 1372. Thomas's appointment, at the age of around thirty-three, suggests he was an educated man, proficient in reading and writing to satisfy the intellectual demands of the role. He was, however, first and foremost a soldier, and although the role of chancellor enabled him to develop in an intense bureaucratic setting, Thomas probably had little desire to remain in the office for an extended period, craving the physicality that came with being in the field. Of course, the rise in income would have helped; a grant in April 1410 records that Thomas was rewarded with 800 marks a year on top of the standard wage he received as chancellor, with a further £1,400 for expenses.[14]

If the three Beaufort brothers hoped that 1410 was the year they would collectively govern the country in tandem with the prince, they could be forgiven their presumption. All three now occupied positions on the Council and, counting an earl, a bishop and a chancellor among their ranks, the siblings wielded considerable influence. Their determination, intelligence and dependability had enabled the threesome to become invaluable to the Lancastrian regime, their devotion to the cause particularly vital as treachery consistently threatened to derail the fledgling dynasty. A common trait had been their unity, a closeness that allowed the brothers to become a significant force to be reckoned with. Fortune's wheel determined otherwise, however. As parliament convened at the end of January, only two of the three Beauforts were present, for John Beaufort had

fallen seriously ill and was consigned to bed. There was to be no recovery.

On 16 March 1410, John, earl of Somerset, captain of Calais, chamberlain of England and eldest of the Beauforts, succumbed to his malady and passed away in St Katherine's by the Tower, a twelfth-century royal hospital near the Tower of London. Somerset's death occurred on Palm Sunday, and as the earl lay dying in his chamber, the rest of the country was joyously commemorating the holy day by carrying palm fronds and singing hymns. Processions littered towns and cities throughout the land, as people marked Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Somerset may even have had the *Passion* read to him on the morning of his death, although whether this brought him comfort or not in his last moments is debateable. What seems surprising is that his death came only eight months after his celebrated display in the Smithfield joust against the Hainaulters, suggesting it wasn't necessarily a long-term affliction that ended his life.

The Hospital of St Katherine had long been under the royal patronage of the queens of England, and may have held a connection with John's mother Katherine Swynford, who for a period was technically the first lady of the land. St Katherine featured prominently in the Beaufort Book of Hours that the earl had commissioned, underlining his personal devotion to a saint his mother had also particularly revered. It seems logical to the medieval mind that if John had developed an illness while he was in London that required medical care, he would have sought help from a royal hospital dedicated to St Katherine.

Although the circumstances of Somerset's initial burial arrangements are unclear, and despite a reference in the *Brut Chronicle* that recorded his burial in the 'Abbey of Tour-hill',[15] the earl was interred close to the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral. He was joined just three years later by his royal half-brother, who chose to be buried just north of the Becket shrine. There is very little extant information about the funeral service, although a record in the

Sacrist's Rolls suggests that of the twenty-two torches provided for the occasion, only twelve were actually used.[16] The chosen resting spot near to Becket's shrine was an honourable concession to the earl, suggesting the intervention of Henry IV. The tomb of Somerset's uncle Edward, the renowned Black Prince, was also located nearby, just to the south of the shrine. It was a prestigious location, albeit temporary.

In 1439, a newly rebuilt chapel dedicated to St Michael was unveiled in the southern transept of the cathedral, at the centre of which was an elaborate, unusual grey marble tomb commissioned by Somerset's widow Margaret Holland, who had died earlier that year. The countess had remarried after the earl's death, taking as her second husband Thomas, duke of Clarence, the second son of Henry IV and nephew of her first husband. The duke had died in 1421 and Margaret, presumably in the awkward position of showing favouritism to one husband over another, elected to be depicted with both spouses atop her tomb.

That the countess was capable of arranging for a new chapel to be erected in England's premier church is testament not only to her vast wealth, but also the high status of her two husbands and the respect their memory was accorded. To accommodate the rebuilding, three existing tombs belonging to a former archbishop, Stephen Langton, and priors Richard Oxenden and Roger Hathbrand were relocated, and on 27 January 1440, orders were given by Henry VI to exhume the bodies of Somerset and Clarence and to arrange their reinterment alongside Margaret in the new chapel.[17]

The earl's likeness, to the left of Margaret, depicts Somerset as a sword-carrying knight, attired in plated armour and surcoat with a bejewelled circlet on his helmet. His face is considerably more lined and weathered than the younger Clarence, and this may have been an attempt to create a realistic representation of Beaufort. An 'SS' collar displays the earl's Lancastrian credentials, while a collection of armorials relating to the Beaufort family was once visible on the side of the tomb. Below Somerset's feet rests an eagle, a reference to a badge he occasionally bore.

On the vaulted ceiling above the effigies were a collection of heraldic bosses, with one displaying Somerset's coat of arms, those of England quartered with France, surrounded by a blue and white border. The antiquarian John Leland, writing a century later, believed the chapel 'was made new for the Honor of Erle John of Somerset', while also noting that 'in the South Wyndowes of the same goodly Chapel be written yn the Glasse Wyndowes' the name of the earl.[18] Although his initial resting place had been honourable, the chapel was an elaborate and extravagant memorial to a valiant life worthy of celebration, albeit one shared with his wife and her second husband. It's a fitting monument to the first Beaufort and a lasting testament to the family's brief tenure atop English society.

Somerset's last will and testament was verbally conveyed to a number of witnesses on the morning of 16 March, the day of his death, suggesting the swiftness of his demise took the earl and his physicians by surprise. Was the fact he had yet to prepare his will evidence that Somerset believed he would recover from his illness? That his wishes were only recorded when Somerset, as the will records when finally transcribed after the event, was languishing close to death, suggests as much.

John, proudly referred to in the will as '*comes Somersetie, cammerarius Anglie & capitaneus Calesie',* the foremost titles and offices he held until his very last breath, bequeathed his soul to God, the Virgin Mary and all the saints; God clearly came first for John Beaufort, although that is hardly an unusual sentiment for the fifteenth century.

The earl was determined to satisfy all outstanding debts, paying particular attention to ensuring his servants received adequate remuneration in accordance with their service and status. Commendably, Somerset felt it was important to take care in death of those who had stood by him in life. The remainder of his goods were jointly placed in the care of his brother Henry and wife Margaret, although it was the bishop of Winchester alone who was named executor of the will, an indication of the deep personal trust and

affection brother had for brother. Who in the kingdom could John depend on to carry out his wishes other than Henry Beaufort?

Witnesses to the earl's verbal wishes, and possibly even his final breaths, included Richard Gardiner, John Boys, Thomas Hardy, John Forest and John Firay, although other unnamed persons were also present according to the text. On 5 April Gardiner, with Thomas Hill and William Baxter, Keeper of the Garderobe and Chaplain of St Katherine's Hospital respectively, were examined in the presence of Archbishop Arundel and Philip Morgan to verify the will's contents. All confirmed the testament contained the wishes of Somerset, also confirming he had named his brother to be sole executor.[19]

The death of John Beaufort deprived the king, and more importantly his brothers Henry and Thomas, of a brave, dependable and gifted ally, an experienced martial commander and a nobleman competent in handling sensitive diplomatic assignments. The manner in which the earl successfully juggled the desires of divergent masters in 1399 suggested Somerset possessed an unflappable demeanour under pressure, with an ability to deceive while avoiding suspicion. With little scandal attached to his name, it seems he had been judicious in his actions and faithful to Henry IV, trusted enough to act as the king's emissary in accompanying the royal princesses Isabella de Valois, Blanche of Lancaster and Joan of Navarre across Europe to their various destinations.

That John had been close to Henry IV is clear, and as chamberlain the earl had even been provided with his own chamber at Eltham Palace, the favourite residence of his half-brother. There seems little doubt Henry had enjoyed the company of a man he had grown close to during a youth spent jousting and crusading across the continent. The pair had not merely been brothers, but rather comrades-in-arms.

As a feudal lord, Somerset took his duty seriously, eager to reward or protect those in his service where appropriate. Aside from securing pardons for transgressions committed by men under his protection, he is known to have given financial rewards to some of his tenants upon their marriages. For example, he made a grant of ten marks for life to

his servant Thomas Hardy on 21 January 1407 after the latter's marriage to Alice Daysye, while an earlier record, dated to 18 September 1399, shows that the earl granted his esquire Thomas Thorley and his new wife Isabel Everard an annual payment of twenty marks. A similar annual grant of twenty marks was also bestowed upon Richard Boyton at the end of March 1409.[20]

Although the payments were not overly generous, and John was certainly not alone among the nobility in such gestures, they nonetheless show the earl did make attempts to be a benevolent lord. His incessant protesting while attempting to secure the payment of wages owed to his garrisons and he himself at Carmarthen and Calais also reveal a determination to do right by his soldiers, although this was a sentiment often frustrated by the financial insolvency of the crown. His preoccupation with satisfying all debts is again illustrated in his will.

On a more personal note, the earl's death left his substantial brood without a father. Somerset's firstborn, Henry, had been baptised on 26 November 1401 when the king stood godfather for a child named in his honour. The dates and locations for the earl's other children are more difficult to ascertain, but the second child John was probably born in 1404. Somerset's first daughter Joan is also thought to have been born around the same time, which raises the possibility they were twins. Of course, it isn't unheard of for siblings to be born in the same calendar year and not be twins, depending on the months in question. Unfortunately, there isn't enough established fact to speculate further, although it should be noted that Joan herself gave birth to a set of twins in 1430.

There are other records that hint at the birth of children to the Somersets. On 27 January 1405, the king granted the earl and countess, staying in Tottenham to the north of London, three tuns of Gascon wine and ten of Malmsey, to be provided from his own personal royal vintry.[21] The fact that the countess was specifically named perhaps suggests Margaret was either pregnant, or had undergone a recent birth, with the wine intended to be as much for

her benefit as her husband's. Was the wine perhaps even a celebratory gift from a king eager to mark the arrival of another nephew, possibly Thomas or Edmund?

A record in the queen's remembrancer accounts for the year 29 September 1405 to 29 September 1406, meanwhile, details how William Loveney, the king's Keeper of the Great Wardrobe, was ordered to arrange for 'the carriage of beds from Tower to Hospit Com Somerset'.[22] The Hospit in this case refers to a Hospitium, a guesthouse often attached to a monastery that was used by visiting dignitaries. It may be the Somersets were staying somewhere that wasn't adequately furnished for the rigours of childbirth and the subsequent recovery process, prompting the king to intervene.

It is clear the earl and countess enjoyed a fruitful marriage during the 1400s, particularly when accounting for Somerset's frequent spells away from home, whether because of military duties in Calais or Wales, or due to diplomatic missions elsewhere in Europe. Their last child, named Margaret for her mother, was born around 1409, but would tragically have no memory of the father who died before she turned a year old. Considering the number of children, the fact that Margaret was so prominently named in the earl's will, and that she chose to honour John with an effigy despite her second marriage to a royal prince, one must presume the union was built on mutual affection, possibly even love. Such sentiment, of course, would have made the loss of Somerset far harder to come to terms with.

For Henry and Thomas Beaufort, the passing of their elder brother came at a crucial moment in their political careers. The younger Beauforts had become embroiled in the enforced transition of power from king to prince, and the loss of Somerset's counsel and close connection to the king was a bitter blow. It was imperative the bishop and chancellor did not alienate their half-brother while he remained on the throne, but it was evident the impetuosity of youth was becoming difficult to contain. It appeared to his subjects that the king did not have long to live, and it was only a matter of time before the crown passed into the hands of the prince. The remaining Beauforts

fully intended to remain central to the governance of the realm once that change inevitably came, for power, once gained, was very difficult to relinquish.

9

Power Lost and Power Gained 1410–1413

Although the death of John Beaufort deprived his brothers, both full and half, of a steadfast ally and advisor, as always, life went on for those left behind. Henry Beaufort was firmly established as one of the wealthiest churchmen in the kingdom, wielding considerable influence in matters of governance, while Thomas Beaufort, now chancellor as well as admiral, was clearly capable of filling Somerset's shoes as secular head of the family.

The king had to ensure his widowed sister-in-law, Margaret Holland, was sufficiently provided for after Somerset's burial so, on 21 April 1410, the dowager countess was granted the customary third of her husband's lands, rents and possessions, intended to aid 'the maintenance of herself and her family'.[1] At the end of the year, Margaret also received her dower, with writs issued to escheators in Leicestershire, Canterbury, Lincoln, Northampton, Middlesex, Somerset, Dorset and London not to interfere. As per the conditions of the payment, the countess took an oath not to remarry without royal licence, the pledge of which was heard by the abbot of Crowland.[2] On 20 June, meanwhile, Margaret had been granted permission for the 'keeping of the body' of her son Henry until he reached fifteen years old, receiving 200 marks a year as maintenance for the new earl of Somerset. Although otherwise unstated, it can be assumed she also retained custody of her other children with John Beaufort.[3]

Somerset's death was a personal distraction fom the wider issues concerning the governance of England in 1410, and his surviving brothers pressed forward with their support of Prince Henry. The zealous heir to the throne also counted on the backing of men such as

the youthful earls of Warwick and Arundel, the latter electing to oppose his uncle Thomas, the archbishop of Canterbury, while providing further ecclesiastical support was the experienced diplomat Henry Chichele, bishop of St David's and a colleague of Bishop Beaufort. It was a formidable and ambitious alliance.

Prince Henry's two youngest brothers, John and Humphrey, also rallied to his side, eager to prove themselves worthy in the eyes of their commanding elder sibling. The twenty-one-year-old John had been dispatched to the north early in his father's reign and appointed Warden of the East March and Constable of England at the tender age of fourteen, and while Humphrey was a year younger with no such military credentials, he was just as keen to impress given the opportunity. Conspicuous by his absence in this ascendant faction was Henry IV's second son, Thomas, about a year younger than the Prince of Wales and widely acknowledged to be the king's favourite. There was good reason for this estrangement, for bad blood had developed between the headstrong Thomas and his uncle Henry Beaufort.

Shortly after Somerset's death, and certainly within the expected period of mourning, Prince Thomas sought to make Margaret Holland his wife, with a papal bull issued on 16 August 1410 to Archbishop Arundel and the bishop of Winchester providing a mandate for the marriage, providing it was 'the king's will'.[4] Regardless of whether the king was in agreement or not, one person who was not supportive of the proposition was Bishop Beaufort, who resolved to block the union. Although love could conceivably have been a factor in the desire of Thomas to wed his uncle's widow, the overriding motivation for marrying this mother of six was her attractive financial status. Aside from the Beaufort inheritance, held by Margaret during the minority of her nine-year-old son Henry, the countess was a beneficiary of the substantial Holland fortune after the death of her brother Edmund, earl of Kent, in 1408.

Prince Thomas, with a swiftness that perhaps exposed his dishonourable intentions, seized control of Margaret's estates, along with custody of the Beaufort children and a colossal sum of 30,000

marks that had been bequeathed to Bishop Henry as sole executor of his brother's will. The prospect of losing both money and control of his brother's heirs incensed the bishop, who found Thomas's actions audacious to say the least. For Henry, concern about the proposed union of Clarence and Margaret largely centred on the possibility of the newlyweds having children together. Any offspring would be of the full blood royal, ranking higher in the line of succession and supplanting the position of their Beaufort half-siblings when it came to matters of preferment.

The bishop would have been neglectful of his duty in looking after his brother's children if he did not intercede on their behalf, and, prompted by his vocal opposition to the marriage, Prince Henry was compelled to intervene, counselling in favour of his persuasive uncle and further fracturing an already tense relationship with his brother. The issue had presumably been the main topic of discussion when both Henrys spent time in each other's company at Bishop Waltham Palace in August, the same month the Papal Bull was issued.[5] Bishop Henry was ultimately able to delay the marriage for two years before it was finally ratified. A financial settlement was reached shortly after the nuptials in May 1412 that allowed Clarence to receive John Beaufort's lands and part of his money, a substantial concession for something he had little claim to. The dismayed bishop had to make do with the remainder of the cash, as well as having to provide 200 marks a year to support the upbringing of the Beaufort children. It was hardly an ideal resolution for Henry, but it did serve to bring to an end the protracted feud between uncle and nephew.

On 10 July 1410, Thomas Beaufort was given a distraction from tensions at court when he was appointed keeper of Barnwell Priory in Cambridgeshire, which 'through bad governance' had become 'burdened with debt'. Thomas, in partnership with administrators such as John Wakering, John Cokeyn and John Rome, was tasked with ensuring the priory was returned to financial solvency. The Augustinian monastery had been sufficiently furnished to host Richard II during 1388 when parliament met at Cambridge, and the present king clearly had intentions for its continued survival, perhaps

intending to use it in future. That the chancellor was successful is evident from the fact Barnwell remained open until the Reformation, although it is unclear what precise involvement he had in its recovery. Thomas likewise was granted the keeping of the Cistercian abbey of Graces by the Tower on 28 November, in which he was assisted by eight other men including Thomas Langley, bishop of Durham.[6]

Throughout the remainder of year and into 1411, the Prince of Wales and his council governed competently and prudently, lowering household expenditure while strengthening the kingdom's defences. As part of this policy, in March 1411 the exasperated councillors finally resolved to bring to justice John Prendergast, a pirate operating off the coast of East Anglia accused of 'divers depredations, spoilations and robberies' against Flemish mariners. Prendergast and his cohorts were adversely affecting the mercantile trade with Flanders, at odds with the peace treaty between England and Burgundy. The commission to capture the pirates was given to Edward Courtenay, earl of Devon, and his son, but their attempts proved ineffective. Within two months the situation had considerably worsened, and on 7 May Thomas Beaufort decided to personally intervene.

Although preoccupied with the office of chancellor, Thomas nevertheless still retained the position of admiral and the continued 'robberies and evil deeds' were committed under his jurisdiction. He secured a commission from the Council to take temporary leave of his duties in London, and, armed with a wage of £1,000, pledged to return only once he had apprehended Prendergast. Beaufort had always been a reluctant chancellor, and leapt at the opportunity to participate in matters more suited to his military bearing. On 12 June he returned to London with Prendergast in chains, with another pirate, William Longe, in tow for good measure.[7] His successful enterprise helped ensure the Flemish truce was maintained for another five years. It was disciplined leadership by example.

If it was anticipated by the Council that Admiral Beaufort would immediately return to his duties as chancellor, they were sorely mistaken. Through a combination of fatigue from his exertions and

lack of motivation for the office, on the day of his return Thomas was presented with the Great Seal at Stratford Abbey by John Wakering, the Keeper of the Rolls. Thomas turned to the king and humbly requested to be allowed a brief respite from his duties, to which King Henry graciously assented. Wakering, equally keen to give up the post, tried in vain multiple times over the following week to transfer the Seal to Thomas, with the hesitant admiral finally taking receipt on the morning of 20 June in his privy chamber. Mentally refreshed and physically reinvigorated, Thomas returned to Westminster to recommence his duties as chancellor.[8]

While the prince's faction had proved capable, largely down to the wise guidance of Henry Beaufort and military competence of Thomas Beaufort, the status quo clearly could not remain indefinitely, particularly once the tenacious king, not for the first time in his reign, exhibited signs of recovering from his illness. A courageous soldier who had commanded armies across Europe and the Middle East in his prime, King Henry summoned all his remaining strength in a determined effort to claw back control of his kingdom. This renewed vigour may have been in response to growing rumours of plots for his deposition. The *English Chronicle* detailed one such conspiracy, in which the prince and Henry Beaufort, in particular, were accused:

> yt wasse accorded betwene the Prynce, Kynge Henry sonne, & Henry Beauforde, Bisshoppe off Wynchestre, and mony other lordez off this londe, that certeyn off theym shulde speke unto the kynge and entrete hym forto resigne the crowne to the Prince Henry, his sonne.[9]

It is unclear if the king was ever actually approached about abdicating, or whether such a plot was even hatched. What is certain is that while the king's rotting and crippled body had let him down over the previous six years, there was still fight in the heart of Henry of Bolingbroke. He was, after all, the first king of the House of Lancaster and grandson of the two greatest English knights of the fourteenth century, Edward III and Henry of Grosmont. As someone

responsible for the deposition of his predecessor, if there was anyone in the kingdom sensitive to the removal of a king by his subjects, it was Henry IV.

On 21 September 1411, the king summoned parliament, which duly assembled on 3 November in Westminster. From the outset, Henry was on the front foot, cautioning the speaker Thomas Chaucer, the Beauforts' cousin, to avoid any novelties during the proceedings and pre-empting any intention to raise the subject of abdication. The king wasted little time in re-establishing his authority, expressing his thanks to the prince's council for their services over the previous eighteen months before absolving them of their duties. On 20 December, the day after parliament was concluded, Thomas Beaufort was officially dismissed as chancellor, and replaced by the renascent Archbishop Arundel. A new council was appointed, with no place for either the prince or the Beauforts. It was a humiliating fall from grace for the trio, deemed surplus to requirements and effectively sacked from their duties.[10]

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Although aspects of the dispute between the two Lancastrian factions had proved bitter, it's misleading to suggest the quarrel had irrevocably damaged relations between the Beauforts and their king. There had been a clear split in opinion on how the kingdom should be governed, but once the king had reasserted his authority, both parties resolved to work together for the common good. The frustrated Prince of Wales, however, was politically ostracised by his father.

On 2 March 1412, Thomas Beaufort, still serving as admiral, was commissioned by the king to lead an investigation into 'all robberies, depredations and spoliations committed by any of the king's lieges at sea', which were contrary to any treaty in place between the English and the duke of Brittany. The earlier apprehension of Prendergast had clearly not eradicated piracy. Thomas was tasked with returning any stolen items he seized, including vessels, wines and salt, to the Bretons while punishing those miscreants who had potentially sabotaged the

king's relationship with his ally.[11] His brother Henry, meanwhile, received royal assent on 3 June sanctioning the election in his diocese of Alice Parys as abbess of the Benedictine Priory of Wherwell.[12]

Both acts indicate the Beauforts had not become *persona non gratae* to King Henry, and remained integral to the ongoing governance of the kingdom. This may have had something to do with the fact that beyond their regularly proving themselves indispensable to their half-brother throughout his reign, the king quite simply did not possess men of the necessary calibre to oust the Beauforts. Their exclusion from the Council was clearly a short-term measure, perhaps to mollify Archbishop Arundel.

The king's strained relationship with his eldest son was complicated by their differing stance on foreign policy, particularly over the complex issue of which party to support in the bitter French civil war between the houses of Burgundy and Orléans, a power struggle between two factions seeking control over the weak and ineffectual king, Charles VI. The Burgundians were led by Charles' first cousin John, known as the Fearless because of his courage in battle, while the Orléans party was controlled by Duke Louis until his brutal assassination in 1407 and thereafter nominally by young Duke Charles, a nephew of the king, encouraged by his father-in-law the count of Armagnac.

Both parties sought an alliance with the English, with the prince favouring an agreement with the Burgundians, as originally had his father. Much to the prince's disillusionment, however, on 18 May 1412, King Henry formally entered an alliance with the Orléans-Armagnac faction by signing the Treaty of Bourges. In return for military assistance, the duke of Orléans and count of Armagnac vowed to recognise English claims to sovereignty over the duchy of Aquitaine. Illness prevented Henry from personally leading an army in France, and with a replacement commander required for the campaign, it was expected the duty would be handed to the Prince of Wales. Humiliatingly for Prince Henry, that honour was given to his younger brother Thomas.

Although the Beauforts, in line with Prince Henry, had also favoured a Burgundian alliance, their reservations were appeased by Thomas Beaufort's appointment on 10 June as one of the principal leaders of the expedition, charged with assembling a retinue of 240 men-at-arms and 700 archers.[13] It was an opportunity for the thirty-five-year-old admiral, always a soldier at heart, to establish his reputation as one of the king's ablest military commanders overseas. The Lancastrians were a family fixated on martial glory, and Thomas was no different to his father or siblings.

King Henry could not send two untitled commanders to France as his military representatives, so plans were quickly initiated to bestow upon both Thomas of Lancaster and Thomas Beaufort titles appropriate to their status. On 5 July 1412, the youngest Beaufort brother was finally inducted into the peerage and ceremoniously girded with the belt of an earl by his half-brother.[14] His chosen title, Dorset, alluded to his elder brother John, who had briefly held the marquisate of Dorset during the reign of Richard II. His nephew Thomas, meanwhile, was raised to the dukedom of Clarence, a title previously held by Lionel of Antwerp in the 1360s, and the earldom of Aumale, a disputed French title once claimed by another of Edward III's sons, Thomas of Woodstock. Other than the Prince of Wales in 1399, they were to be the only new investitures of Henry IV's reign.

As it transpired, such thorough preparations proved to be futile, for shortly after the English embarked on their mission, the two warring French factions negotiated a fragile truce, frustrating King Henry's plans to take advantage of the disarray. Clarence and Dorset landed with their army at St-Vaast-la-Hougue in Normandy on 10 August, unaware of the truce and the fact they were dangerously exposed by the *volte-face* of the Armagnacs. Once informed, the brave decision was taken to continue with their campaign, causing as much disruption to the French as possible. It seems likely Clarence and Dorset's desire for military glory outweighed hesitations either man had about crossing enemy lines.

Ably supported by Edward, duke of York, and the earls of Ormond,

Oxford and Salisbury, the two commanders quickly captured the towns of Châteauneuf, St Rémy and Belléme before progressing through Anjou and into Blois where they seized Meung and defiantly crossed the Loire. The English left significant devastation in their wake, having 'set fire to towns, plundered villages, and captured fortresses, some of which they destroyed, while others they refrained from putting to the flames for an agreed sum of money'.[15] Having satisfied their lust for conflict, and swelled their coffers with loot in the process, Clarence, Dorset and their troops turned south-west and headed for Gascony, where on 11 December they marched into English-controlled Bordeaux. The campaign failed to earn its commanders the honour and glory they had envisioned, and other than the invaluable experience Dorset gained from his first French operation as a senior commander in a hostile French environment, it had generally been a futile exercise.

There would be other opportunities in the future for Thomas Beaufort. For his half-brother Henry IV, however, the underwhelming excursion was one of the final acts he oversaw as king of England. He was once more showing signs of grave illness, and although Henry had a track record of returning from the brink of death, this time there was to be no miraculous recovery. The king was dying, and after lingering on throughout the winter of late 1412 and early 1413, Henry IV of England finally died on 20 March 1413, bringing to a close the tumultuous and controversial reign of the first Lancastrian monarch. His body was laid in state in Westminster Abbey and buried, as per his wishes, in the Trinity Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral. Only a few feet away lay the grave of his beloved half-brother John Beaufort.

The king's will, drafted in January 1409 when it was originally believed he had been close to death, offers a vivid insight into the mind of a man wracked with personal anxiety, even referring to himself as a 'sinful wretch' with a 'sinful soul'. Did ordering the deaths of an anointed king and consecrated archbishop weigh heavily on Henry's mind as he nervously prepared to meet his maker? One wonders if he ever shared such concerns with the Beauforts in private, perhaps seeking solace in the company of his dependable half-

brothers, some of the only people he could be open with. Although Henry always had warm relations with his siblings, the foursome are not mentioned by name in the will, though the king did pointedly thank his lords and the 'trew people for the trewe service that they have done to me', gratitude that surely included the Beauforts for the decade of dutiful service given between 1399 and 1409.[16]

Henry IV profoundly changed the face of England when he usurped the throne from Richard II. Whether it was for better or worse is open to interpretation, but one wonders what would have become of the kingdom if Richard II's despotic reign had been allowed to continue unabated. Would the Welsh, or the Percys for that matter, have rebelled in the manner they did, causing devastating pitched battles to be fought across England and Wales? Would the English have had its glorious day at Agincourt, only two years after his death, without a hardy warrior of Lancastrian blood on the throne? Perhaps the Wars of the Roses could even have been avoided, with no requirement to return the throne to the supposed rightful line?

Of course, it's complete conjecture to predict how events would have unfolded, suffice to say that Henry's deposition of Richard caused immense upheaval in England and Wales, the repercussions of which were felt decades after his death. Although his achievements in fending off multiple rebellions throughout his thirteen-year reign have been overshadowed by his son's subsequent military accomplishments, it is perhaps telling that William Shakespeare started his acclaimed Henriad tetralogy of plays in 1398, focusing on the rise of Henry of Bolingbroke.

The first generation of Beauforts played a pivotal role in establishing their half-brother on the throne, and were integral in keeping him there against significant odds. Their actions were not selfless, for all three brothers profited handsomely from their assiduous efforts. John Beaufort died in 1410 as a respected member of the peerage, competently serving as King's Chamberlain and captain of Calais while gradually establishing a sizable landed estate to bequeath to his children. Thomas Beaufort had proved himself a

well-rounded individual, serving as admiral and chancellor before receiving an earldom in recognition of his military capabilities. Bishop Henry Beaufort, meanwhile, although less prominent in the last year of the king's reign, had also served as chancellor and possessed the richest bishopric in England. The cleric's administrative skills and financial acumen had enabled him to rapidly amass great wealth, which at times helped prop up the king's penurious regime.

The bishop and Dorset now focused their attentions on supporting their nephew Prince Henry during the transitional period. With the death of his father, the impatient prince, in the prime of his life and eager to rule, finally acceded to a throne he had long coveted. Standing conspicuously at his side, and returning to the forefront of governance, were his two Beaufort uncles.

The Beaufort-Nevilles
1397–1413

While John, Henry and Thomas Beaufort assumed leading roles throughout the reign of Henry IV, their sister Joan Beaufort, countess of Westmorland and wife of the most powerful magnate in northern England, had been preoccupied with establishing her own position beyond the Trent.

Although many nobles regularly campaigned away from home during the first decade of the fifteenth century, Ralph Neville remained close to his northern estates, charged by successive kings with securing the troublesome Scottish border. This proximity to his various residences, such as Raby Castle in County Durham or Sheriff Hutton in Yorkshire, probably accounts for the regularity of Joan's pregnancies throughout this phase of their marriage. The countess spent much of the first two decades of her second marriage with child, and in total bore Neville fourteen children, an astounding strain on her body even discounting the two children she already had from her first marriage with Sir Robert Ferrers.

The birth order of these Beaufort-Neville children is uncertain, although the eldest are generally acknowledged to be Katherine, Eleanor and Richard, all born at the start of the century. These were followed by Robert, William and George, probably between the years 1404 to 1407, with Henry, Thomas, Cuthbert, John, Edward and Joan following thereafter. As the countess approached her mid-thirties the rate of birth slowed considerably, with Joan giving birth to Anne around 1414 and her final child, Cecily, the famed 'Rose of Raby', in 1415. Some of the children died young, a distressing if inevitable reality of the medieval period, but those who survived provided a substantial Beaufort-blooded brood upon which to build the Neville future.

As several of the children were female, it was an inevitability of the times that the earl sought prestigious unions for his eldest daughters once they reached marriageable age. For Katherine and Eleanor Neville, this time arrived early in 1412 when on 12 January a marriage licence was granted for the pair to be wed in Raby Castle's chapel.[1]

Katherine, around twelve years old, was married to John Mowbray, the twenty-year-old earl of Norfolk and Nottingham and son of Thomas Mowbray, the duke of Norfolk who had quarrelled with Henry of Bolingbroke in 1398. John's disgraced brother Thomas had also fallen foul of the Lancastrians and was beheaded in 1405 for his role in Archbishop Scrope's uprising. The younger Mowbray was desperate to recover the estates and titles stripped from his father and brother and the marriage was agreed to with the intention of reconciling the Mowbrays with the Lancastrian affinity, represented by a daughter of the Beaufort-Neville union. In time Norfolk was fully integrated into the Lancastrian circle, and even participated in the siege of Harfleur in 1416 alongside his wife's uncle Thomas Beaufort before his eventual restoration to the dukedom in 1425. The couple's only child, John, was born in September 1415, while Norfolk was campaigning in Normandy, and would in time become the 3rd Duke, instrumental in the early years of the Wars of the Roses, albeit on the opposite side of the conflict to his Beaufort cousins.

Eleanor Neville's chosen groom was Richard le Despenser, 4th Baron Burghersh and a distant relative of the Beauforts as a grandson of Edmund of Langley, younger brother of John of Gaunt. Similar to Norfolk's situation, Lord Burghersh was also the son of a disgraced magnate, in his case Thomas le Despenser, the earl of Gloucester involved in the Epiphany Rising in 1400. The childless union was short-lived, however; the baron died in 1414 and was buried in Tewkesbury Abbey among his ancestors.

Eleanor's second marriage was again engineered by her parents, perhaps with the input of her Beaufort uncles, and was one of far greater dynastic consequence than her first. In another act of

reconciliation through marriage, Eleanor's groom was Henry Percy, the namesake son of his father Henry 'Hotspur' and grandson of the fallen earl of Northumberland, her father's erstwhile rival in the north who had been killed at Bramham Moor in 1408. The younger Percy spent much of his youth exiled in Scotland, but was now in his early twenties and, like his new brother-in-law Norfolk, wished to reclaim part of his inheritance. It may not have sat easily with a Percy to witness his family's supremacy in the north usurped by the Nevilles, but young Henry had little choice other than to accept the hand of friendship extended to him. The wedding took place in February 1416 after Percy crossed the border into the hands of his new in-laws, and the same year he was restored to his grandfather's earldom as the 2nd Earl. Eleanor, by consequence, was raised to the rank of countess, on par with her mother Joan, and the Percys' first child, John, was born in 1418, followed throughout the following decade by another Henry, the eventual heir, Thomas, Katherine, George, Ralph, Richard, William, Joan and Anne. Along with the earl, four of these Beaufort-descended children would be killed during the Wars of the Roses.

Although it was the children of her second marriage who received greater attention due to the prominence of their Neville father, Joan Beaufort did not neglect the two daughters she had from her first marriage to Robert Ferrers. On 28 October 1407, Elizabeth Ferrers, about fourteen years old at the time and the eldest Beaufort grandchild, married John Greystoke, a scion of a respected and noteworthy Cumbrian family that had rallied to Henry of Bolingbroke's side after the latter's invasion in 1399.[2] It seems likely Elizabeth's stepfather had some input in the choice of her husband, as the Greystokes were Westmorland's tenants in the north-west. Elizabeth and John Greystoke's first child, born around 1414, was named Ralph, and although a traditional name in the Greystoke family, it was perhaps intended to honour the Neville patriarch.

Elizabeth proved to be considerably fertile, not unlike her mother Joan and grandmother Katherine Swynford, giving birth to six sons and six daughters during the course of her marriage. She became Baroness Greystoke in 1418 after her husband inherited his father's

title, and she lived comfortably until her death in 1434. Lady Greystoke predeceased her formidable mother by about six years and was buried in the Dominican Priory of the Blackfriars in York. After her husband's death two years later, the baronetcy was inherited by her son Ralph Greystoke, and his royal connection as a great-grandson of John of Gaunt helped consolidate the Greystokes' position in the Lancastrian north-west. He survived the turmoil of the Wars of the Roses and witnessed the accession of his distant kinsman Henry Tudor before passing away in 1487.

If Westmorland's involvement in the marriage of his wife's eldest Ferrers' daughter is likely, then he was certainly involved in her second daughter's nuptials, for Mary Ferrers was married to her stepbrother Sir Ralph Neville, the earl's son from his first marriage to Margaret Stafford. Their son John Neville was born around 1418, later becoming a Sheriff of Lincolnshire, and the couple also had a daughter, named Joan after her grandmother.

Although Countess Joan remained in the north for much of her half-brother's reign, close to the Neville estates and among her ever-growing nursery, she was not above using her considerable connections in the south to intervene in matters close to her heart. A letter signed *J de W*, for Joan of Westmorland, was dispatched from Raby Castle to King Henry in 1406 beseeching her half-brother to intervene on behalf of a couple who had fallen on hard times after they 'married each other for downright love, without thinking this time what they should have to live upon'.

The impetuous pair, Christopher and Margaret Standith, had several children together, and this may have prompted the empathetic countess to intercede upon discovering their plight, having been frequently pregnant herself. That Margaret came to Joan, 'trusting that my intercession might avail her' with the king, suggests the compassionate countess was considered an approachable patroness worth soliciting for help. The language used in the letter was informal and betrayed the countess's anxiety for the king's wellbeing, reading less like a petition to a sovereign but rather that of concerned sister to

her brother. The first paragraph, in particular, was effusive in its praise for the king while hoping for his continued welfare:

> I recommend myself to your royal and high lordship in the most obedient manner which, with my whole, entire, and simple heart, I can most humbly do, as she who desires to know of you, and of your most noble estate and most perfect health, such prosperity as your royal and most honourable heart can desire.[3]

Joan ended her missive with the lasting hope that God grants the king 'a most honourable and long life', and though the king survived her letter for seven more years, his descent into debilitating illness from 1406 onwards, when the letter was composed, surely inspired her fixation on his health.

It would be inaccurate to suggest Joan Beaufort was merely an emotional character, however; she was, after all, a Lancastrian by blood. Her father Gaunt had incurred severe criticism during his life for associating with, and protecting, members of the early Lollard movement, and a similar religious curiosity seems to have existed in the countess, who also chose to associate with figures widely ostracised by the Church, in her case Margery Kempe, a controversial mystic from Lynn in Norfolk. Kempe became notorious for her alleged visions of Christ and travelled extensively throughout England and beyond discussing her spiritual experiences with anyone willing to abide her company. Her life was later recounted in the *Book of Margery Kempe*, an extraordinary work considered the first English-language autobiography, and the book includes an episode in which Kempe was forced to defend herself against allegations of inappropriate advice she had supposedly dispensed to the countess and her daughter Elizabeth Greystoke.

Kempe was arrested in the autumn of 1417 and brought before Henry Bowet, archbishop of York, accused of imploring young Elizabeth to leave her husband, counsel which allegedly 'well pleased' Joan Beaufort. The mystic denied issuing such orders, although when

questioned further admitted she had merely told the pair a 'good tale of a lady who was damned because she would not love her enemies'.[4] Despite the protestations of some friars at the inquest, Archbishop Bowet determined that such advice did not warrant imprisonment, and Kempe was sent on her way with letters of safe conduct.

What prompted such advice is unclear, as is the identity of any potential enemies of the countess and her daughter. What does emerge from the account is that Joan had no qualms about consorting with those deemed politically or socially undesirable, and chose to act in the manner she alone considered appropriate. She was very much her father's daughter in this respect, and in time her youngest daughter Cecily would exhibit similar traits during her own adulthood.

The earl of Westmorland unquestionably prospered from his second marriage, taking full advantage of the fact that his in-laws occupied the throne. The Nevilles had enjoyed a fruitful relationship with the House of Lancaster before the Beaufort union, with Ralph's father John a highly regarded member of John of Gaunt's retinue, but once the duke's descendants acceded to the throne, ducal sponsorship became royal patronage, and Henry IV treated his brother-in-law generously.

Although the title earl was bestowed upon Ralph by Richard II, along with the lordships of Penrith and Sowerby and customs profits from the port of Newcastle-upon-Tyne,[5] the string of appointments and grants after Henry IV usurped the throne only served to increase the affluence, and influence, of the Neville family. On 30 September 1399, the very first day of the Lancastrian reign, Westmorland was granted the office of Earl Marshal, with all fees belonging to the position,[6] an early indication of the military role he was expected to play in the reign of his wife's half-brother.

Another sign of Westmorland's close connection with the Lancastrians is evident from a royal licence granted to the earl on 8 March 1403, permitting him, among others, to establish a chantry in a newly built chapel on the north side of St Paul's Cathedral.[7] The chantry was to house several priests to pray for the soul of

Westmorland's father-in-law, John of Gaunt, in accordance with the duke's will, of which Neville served as executor. Any lingering doubt about Henry IV's trust in the earl were dispelled that same year when the king entrusted him with the care and tutelage of his son John after the young prince was appointed Warden of the East March. Westmorland, for his part, was named Warden of the West March.

It was property that particularly demonstrated the growing prosperity of the Nevilles in the early part of the fifteenth century. As well as Raby, their resplendent fortress in County Durham, the earl and countess also possessed the castles of Middleham, Richmond, Brancepeth and Sheriff Hutton, all of which ranked among the finest structures in the north.

Middleham Castle in Wensleydale came into the hands of the Nevilles in 1270 and was elaborately expanded through successive generations as the family accumulated both wealth and power. By 1397, the year Ralph Neville married Joan Beaufort, the quadrangular castle contained a towering two-storey keep with several opulent chambers for when the lord and lady were in residence. Of particular interest to the Beaufort countess during her time at Middleham must have been the private Solar Chamber, located near the Great Hall and renowned for a large window overlooking the scenic dale, a sun-filled spot in which she may have relaxed among her ladies during the summer progresses. The elegantly furnished room also contained a latrine and a considerable fireplace for the winter period. The Solar Chamber offered an isolated but comfortable respite from the frenzied activity of castle life.

Richmond Castle, with its Norman keep standing over one hundred feet above the River Swale, was around ten miles north of Middleham and provided the Nevilles another extravagant residence to visit while exploring their considerable estates. Unlike Westmorland's other fortresses, Richmond had not been part of his inheritance but rather was generously bestowed upon him by Henry IV, who, on 20 October 1399, granted to Neville 'for his labours and expenses for the good of the realm' the castle, honour and lordship of Richmond.[8] The lordship

and castle of Sheriff Hutton was located further south than the other Neville possessions, only ten miles from York, convenient for any business in or around the kingdom's greatest northern city. The couple stamped their mark on the castle's south-eastern tower soon after assuming ownership by commissioning an elaborate frieze above the gatehouse, on which were displayed four carved shields; three bore the arms of Ralph Neville, while the fourth proudly bore those same arms impaled with those of his Beaufort wife. It was an enduring reminder of their presence in this corner of Yorkshire.

Though there is no reason to suggest Lady Joan was anything other than a subservient countess to her husband, preferring to concentrate on matters of family rather than business, she was not exempt from receiving grants from the king in her own right. On 12 August 1403, for example, Joan was granted the marital rights of John Clifford, the underage son and heir of the deceased Thomas de Clifford, 6th Baron Clifford and nominal head of a distinguished Cumbrian family well known to the Nevilles.[9] The eventual bride chosen for young Clifford was Elizabeth Percy, daughter of Henry 'Hotspur' and a prudent choice as it removed a Percy heir with Mortimer blood from the wider marriage market and brought her into the Neville affinity.

Perhaps the most significant, and far-reaching, consequence that resulted from the Beaufort-Neville marriage was the resettlement of the Neville estates on the children of Ralph and Joan. The transferral of estates to the issue of his second wife was dynastically a sensible strategy by the earl; he had gained much from his marriage to the half-sister of the king, and after Joan's legitimisation in 1397 there were no barriers to future progression for his children who, through his Beaufort spouse, were great-grandchildren of Edward III.

This contentious decision was taken shortly after the couple's wedding, predating the birth of their eldest son, Richard Neville, born around 1400. That the earl took this course of action without knowing the personality, character and worthiness of the prospective heir suggests Westmorland was determined to further the interests of his second family over his first based solely on their bloodline. As it

transpired, Richard proved to be more than capable as a magnate, and certainly vindicated his father's decision, but at the time of the resettlement programme, Westmorland could not have foreseen this. Joan Beaufort's children with the earl owed much to their mother's parentage, but whether they recognised this or not is unclear.

The process of transferring the estates was shrewd in its execution, if morally dubious. Many of the lands belonging to Westmorland were bestowed upon loyal members of his retinue, before they were subsequently regranted back to the earl. In the second instance, however, there was one key alteration to the deeds. The new grant had the added provision that Westmorland's lands were to be held in jointure with his Beaufort wife and to pass to any heirs they had together. In the event the earl died first, which proved to be the case, the lands were not to automatically pass to his legal heir, but to remain in the hands of his second wife.

An early example of this policy occurred on 5 February 1398 when the earl bestowed his Essex manor of Clavering upon Richard Clitheroe, John Darrell and John Witton, who promptly granted the property back to the 'earl and Joan, his wife, and the heirs of the earl'.[10] On 6 November 1404, a licence was granted to give two men in Westmorland's service, Thomas Green and John Morton, the castle and manor of Sheriff Hutton, along with fifty-two dwellings, sixty-four bovates (about fifteen acres each), twelve acres of meadow, ten of woodland and 200 acres of pasture, all situated around the villages of East Lilling, West Lilling and Cornborough. As with Clavering, the grant also permitted the lands and castle to be given back to the earl, with the stipulation that they would be held in conjunction with 'Joan his wife and the heirs male of their bodies with remainder to his right heirs'.[11]

Clearly such resettlement was a contentious issue, and viewed with considerable disdain by those disinherited by the earl's actions. Westmorland's first family, the children he had with Margaret Stafford, were understandably distressed by the development. Their father had amassed a significant dominion in the north, with lands

stretching from Yorkshire to Northumberland and from Durham to Cumbria, and it was anticipated all would pass into the hands of his eldest son with Margaret, his namesake Ralph. Although the younger Ralph remained heir to the earldom of Westmorland, which was vested in the eldest legal male heir only, the title would no longer enjoy use of the palatial homes of Raby, Sheriff Hutton, Richmond and Middleham. It was a bitter blow to the senior Neville line, and certainly showed ruthlessness on the earl's part. Whether he could, or would, appreciate it or not, Westmorland's favouritism of the Beauforts created a vicious divide between his two sets of children, an estrangement that would gradually manifest into open conflict just a decade after his death.

Ruthless or not, the motivation behind Westmorland's decision was logical – he was simply gambling on his second line, the Beaufort-Nevilles, attaining loftier heights than could be expected from the first line, the Stafford-Nevilles. Much of the earl's influence in the north, which chiefly stemmed from a steady accumulation of grants and lands at the expense of his rivals in the region, came because of his association with Joan Beaufort. Ralph Neville was unquestionably a skilled administrator, having also regularly proved himself a highly competent military commander in the perilous Scottish border region, but advancement during the medieval period often depended on influential connections – and those his second countess had in abundance.

For Joan, the situation was less complicated; the future of her children was paramount, and the fact their spirited daughter Cecily became the mother of kings Edward IV and Richard III vindicates their decision. Ironically, however, it was the countess's grandchildren through Richard and Cecily who were principally responsible for the destruction of their Beaufort kin during the Wars of the Roses.

By 1413, the year Joan Beaufort's nephew acceded to the throne as Henry V, the earl of Westmorland and his countess commanded a northern hegemony that compared favourably with John of Gaunt's during the duke of Lancaster's zenith in the late thirteenth century.

They had established a solid Lancastrian north-east, which, combined with the traditional powerbase of the north-west, provided the kings of Lancaster with a stable support network during times of strife. The Nevilles held sway from Yorkshire to the Scottish border, encompassing large parts of Westmorland, Durham, Cumberland and Northumberland. They were virtually untouchable, and much of that was owed to the Beaufort connection.

A Time of War
1413–1416

Henry V ascended the throne in a stronger position than his father, unhindered by internal threats and with a treasury gradually emerging from crippling insolvency. His ambitions, quelled for too long, knew no bounds, so it was little surprise when the new king swiftly initiated plans to invade France, believing lasting glory could only be achieved if the French were brought to heel. Henry considered his great-grandfather Edward III's claim to France to be just, and most of the war-hungry English lords, including the Beauforts who were themselves descended from the great king, were inclined to agree.

Preparations for the invasion took almost two years, but in the meantime there was much to occupy the Beauforts' time and energy. Bishop Henry Beaufort was appointed chancellor shortly after the king's accession, ample reward for his stanch support in previous years, while on 3 June 1413, Thomas Beaufort, now raised to the earldom of Dorset, was reconfirmed as Admiral of England, Ireland and Aquitaine,[1] receiving authorisation from the Council on 29 June to formally receive the fealty of the Gascons.[2]

With Thomas, duke of Clarence, rushing home from Bordeaux to attend his father's funeral, Dorset remained in Aquitaine as the king's senior representative in the duchy and on 22 July was formally appointed the king's lieutenant. His authority was extensive. Already empowered to receive oaths of fealty from the Gascons, Dorset was now permitted to receive similar oaths from any enemies of the king that came under his control, whether they were English, Irish, Welsh, Scottish or French, and was also authorised to summon an army if he required to launch destructive *chevauchées* into hostile territory. If the earl needed funding for such expeditions, or to bolster his defences, he could raise existing taxes or levy new ones, as well as minting gold

and silver coins on behalf of his king. To further reinforce his uncle's position, the king issued orders throughout the duchy 'to all the ecclesiastics, nobles, communities, king's officers and king's liege men of the regions to obey and attend the king's lieutenant whenever they will be required by him'.[3]

With such wide-ranging powers, Dorset had no intention of maintaining a low profile. That summer, intending to test the resolve of the French, he led a force out of Aquitaine, swiftly capturing the towns of Ribérac and Aubeterre-sur-Dronne before moving north-west to Montandre and Barbezieux-Saint-Hillaire. Entering the Armagnac-controlled territory of Saintonge, the earl's men crossed the Charente River, taking the hilltop fortresses of Taillebourg and Soubise before threatening the port town of Rochefort. All the towns Dorset attacked were small fortifications and near river crossings, strategic locations intended to demotivate the French while evading a pitched battle against a superior force. It was a tactically sound policy, a form of shock and awe that carried minimal risk to the Englishmen.

French resistance was finally forthcoming under a defensive force led by Jacques de Créquy, lord of Heilly and captain of Talmont, who fortified the town of Saint-Jean-d'Angely and boldly threatened to 'smash the English and chase them out of the country'. Dorset may have anticipated this move, however, for late in July 1413 he intercepted Heilly with a force of 240 men-at-arms and 1,200 archers and killed many of the captain's soldiers, with Heilly himself captured and taken back to Bordeaux. For the remainder of the summer, the English controlled the entrance to the Charente, restricting French attempts to provision the cities of Cognac and Angoulême, among others. Thomas Beaufort was proving to be a thorn in the side of the French, although lack of funding curtailed any further advancement.[4]

By the autumn, the French had regrouped; Jean I, duke of Bourbon, purposefully marched south with an army of 1,300 men-at-arms and 800 archers. By 23 November, Soubise and Taillebourg had been recaptured. Dorset's weary army was unable to offer much resistance to Bourbon's superior force, particularly as the earl

struggled to pay his troops or replenish their supplies. A desperate appeal was dispatched to England with Dorset stressing his position in the duchy was coming under severe threat. King Henry duly arranged for his uncle to be given an emergency payment of £5,600 and 500 sheaves of arrows for the archers, for which the Lieutenant of Aquitaine was expected to rally his soldiers and ensure the continued safekeeping of the duchy.[5]

Dorset was not a fool, and reasoned the only way he could achieve this was to agree a year-long truce with the French, with a treaty ratified on 2 February 1414. His short-term aim of harrying the countryside around Aquitaine, weakening several garrisons in the process, had been achieved, and the earl retreated into Bordeaux with his men to recover throughout the spring where his plan to raise taxation to resume his campaign was hampered by the town's poverty. Shortly thereafter, he departed for London.[6]

Thomas's efforts in Aquitaine did not go unrewarded. On 14 July 1414, he was granted the town of Stratford Langthorne in Essex for the harbouring of his retinue and horses when summoned for parliament in Westminster; on 22 September, Dorset received custody of all castles, lordships and manors of the recently deceased William de Ros, 6th Baron Ros de Helmsley, while Ros's heir John remained underage.[7] If the earl's service received recognition from above, then he was also keen to acknowledge the efforts of those beneath him, the numerous servants and officials he employed who carried out his commands throughout the duchy and beyond.

On 21 September 1413, Dorset's clerk Philip Caxton was granted keepership of all Papers, Protocols and Registers for life, while another clerk named Johan Mouliney was appointed Executory of Bordelais, both for the good service they provided Dorset. On 6 December, an esquire named Bernat Dupuch was granted all lands and possessions that had formerly belonged to Ramon-Guilhem de Got, the lord of Castets-en-Dorthe, specifically 'for his good service to Beaufort and in the wars of Henry IV'. Some received greater reward; on 17 July 1414, a knight in Dorset's retinue was elevated to the status of baron, again

because of services rendered to the earl.[8]

Back in England, preparations continued throughout the summer of 1414 for King Henry's anticipated invasion of France, with vast quantities of arms and siege equipment procured from all corners of the realm, along with standard provisions such as food and ale. Such an operation required extensive funding, and the wealthiest men in the kingdom were coerced into providing loans. Henry Beaufort, as richest bishop in England, was an obliging lender and forwarded a substantial sum totalling £1,333 6*s* 8*d* for his nephew's enterprise.[9]

When parliament assembled in Westminster on 19 November 1414, it was the bishop of Winchester, as chancellor, who opened the tense proceedings. He wasted little time, getting straight to the point. The king wanted war with France, and Bishop Beaufort was tasked with putting forward the case. Not a man to shirk his duties, the bishop boldly announced to all the lords present, including his brother Dorset, that

> our most sovereign lord the king desires especially that good and wise action should be taken against his enemies outside the realm, and that he will strive for the recovery of the inheritance and right of his crown outside the realm which has for a long time been withheld and wrongfully kept since the time of his progenitors, kings of England.[10]

It wasn't mere braggadocio, but rather a declaration of intent from the mouth of one Henry, conveying the wishes of another. Before parliament was concluded, the bishop reiterated the king's fervent stance, firmly proclaiming that 'man is given a time of peace and a time of war'. As the king deemed it to be a time of war, his Beaufort chancellor requested a double subsidy of tax from the commons. Typically, the townsfolk and clergy were taxed one tenth of any moveable goods they peddled while the less affluent rural communities were compelled to provide one fifteenth. The bishop requested those standard amounts to be increased twofold, an unpopular policy under any regime. After some deliberation on the

matter, parliament reluctantly granted the appeal, providing one last attempt was made at negotiating peace.

The peace talks began early in 1415 when, on 2 February, an English contingent led by Thomas Beaufort travelled to Paris. The visit coincided with the earl receiving the first in several staggered payments, totalling £5,397 6*s* 4*d*, that he was owed in wages for his duty in Aquitaine, a prudent move by the Council who were keen to avoid a mutinous garrison just as they entered a war with France.[11]

Dorset was accompanied on his diplomatic assignment by Richard Courtenay, bishop of Norwich; Richard Grey, 4th Baron Grey of Codnor; and the king's household esquires William Bourchier, John Phelip and William Porter. French chronicler Enguerrand Monstrelet reported that the English party, conveyed by six hundred horses, stayed at the Temple while in the French capital, and 'carried themselves so magnificently' while riding through the city that the Parisiens 'were very much astonished'. On 10 February, once they had settled into their apartments, the Englishmen were entertained by Charles VI, who hosted a 'very grand festival of eating, drinking, tilting and dancing', with the king himself challenging the duke of Alençon for the benefit of his guests. Also present were the dukes of Brabant and Orleans, as well as the queen of France.

During their sojourn, Dorset and his companions were also invited to the king's palace of St Ouen to witness a tournament between three Portuguese knights and three Frenchmen. As England was a recognised ally of Portugal, the earl was given the honour of introducing the Portuguese to the crowd, in effect sponsoring their participation. Much to his indignation, the three knights performed poorly and were routed by their superior opponents, surrendering to save their lives. If Thomas Beaufort was publicly embarrassed, he had little option than to suppress his anger while a guest of the French king. Privately, the incident may have served as motivation for the impending campaign.[12]

Much of the discussion during the peace talks centred on the betrothal of Henry V to Princess Katherine, Charles VI's youngest

daughter. That the English were earnest in their desire to secure a union is undoubted, but it could only ever be on Henry's terms, and not those of the French. The English ambassadors made several unreasonable demands regarding land, and with little willingness to compromise, no agreement was reached. Having thanked their hosts for the hospitality, perhaps through gritted teeth in Dorset's case, the English envoys departed Paris 'without accomplishing aught', according to the disparaging words of Adam of Usk.[13]

Of the many territorial demands made by Dorset's delegation, one in particular is noteworthy. The ambassadors, and very possibly the earl himself, demanded the return into King Henry's hands of Beaufort Castle, the Lancastrian fortress surreptitiously captured by the French in 1369, over forty years earlier. What was the intention behind this request? Having originally passed into ownership of his family in the thirteenth century, there was some validity to the king's claim, but it's tantalising to suggest the castle was earmarked for his uncles, having been the inspiration for their name. Of course, it's likely Henry knew such demands were going to be rejected, and so it was only ever intended as a token gesture to his kinsmen.

Thomas Beaufort's assignment was never truly intended to succeed. In fact, while Dorset was in Paris, his bishop brother had been preoccupied with a diplomatic assignment of his own, one of far greater importance to Henry V. The king did not want peace, he wanted war; and for that he needed money. On 14 March 1415, a royal embassy including the bishop was dispatched to the Guildhall to petition London's mayor and his aldermen for the colossal loan of 10,000 marks. Supporting the Beaufort chancellor were the king's brothers, the dukes of Bedford and Gloucester; his cousin Edward, duke of York; and Henry Chichele, who had replaced Thomas Arundel as archbishop of Canterbury after the latter's death in February the previous year. It was an impressive, if intimidating, group of men, specifically recruited to convey the urgency of the king's request. Henry had not merely dispatched messengers, but rather his very best, and highest-ranking, subjects. The mayor predictably acquiesced to the request, not as though he had much choice in the matter, but he

did secure a deposit of a golden collar set with precious stones.[14]

Dorset's role in the preparations for war had not ended with his diplomatic mission to Paris. On 19 March, in his capacity as admiral, he received a command from the king to oversee the assembly of the English navy, possibly using part of the money his brother Henry had obtained from the mayor. The earl was requested, 'for urgent causes', to arrange for 'all ships, barges, balingers and other vessels of England' to be 'arrested on behalf of the king and brought to the port of Southampton'. It was a substantial undertaking, for the kingdom had hundreds of ports from Cornwall up to Northumberland, but nonetheless Dorset was expected to organise and complete the process by 8 May at the latest.[15]

The Beauforts also attended a series of council meetings throughout the spring of 1415, further establishing their position at the heart of Henry V's plans for the French invasion. A meeting on 16 April in Westminster was attended by forty-three members of the nobility, including all four royal dukes, the two archbishops, eight bishops and nine earls.[16]. Sitting alongside Thomas and Henry Beaufort was their brother-in-law Ralph Neville, allowing the three men a rare opportunity to spend some time in each other's company. As chancellor, responsibility fell to Bishop Beaufort to conduct the proceedings, which primarily focused on the payment schedules for the forthcoming campaign.

Negotiating on behalf of the king, he queried whether payment to the assembled lords for the first three months of service could be made in advance, with all following quarterly payments settled in arrears. This was not a popular policy, as it would leave individual captains out of pocket in the interim. After hearing the case, the lords withdrew from the chamber to deliberate on the request out of earshot of the bishop, and upon their collective return, it was Dorset who stepped forward to inform his relieved brother of the lords' approval. Had the Beauforts colluded beforehand to ensure a positive response? It seems very unlikely the brothers had not, at the very least, discussed the matter in private.

Two days later, the council reconvened to determine the wages of each soldier and it was agreed each duke on the campaign would receive one mark per day's service with an earl receiving half a mark. A baron was to be paid four shillings a day, a knight two shillings and an esquire twelve dimes. An archer, meanwhile, was only to receive six dimes while each thirty-man company of men-at-arms was to receive 100 marks per quarter. Bishop Beaufort also announced that Bedford had been appointed to govern England while the king was out of the country, assisted in his duties by a nine-man council that included himself and his brother-in-law Westmorland. Dorset, however, was required in France.[17]

On 24 May, the Beauforts attended another meeting in the Blackfriars Priory where, with Thomas FitzAlan, earl of Arundel, they interrogated members of the affluent Italian community of London. Their intention was to bolster the king's war chest by persuading their audience, comprising six merchants from Florence, four from Venice and two from Lucca, that it was customary to provide payment to a king when trading in his realm. If such payment was not forthcoming, then it was the king's prerogative to have them imprisoned. The Beauforts and Arundel suggested the Florentines hand over some jewels, gold and silver to the value of £1,200, with the Venetians and Luccans expected to provide payments of £1,000 and £200 respectively. It wasn't a polite request, but outright extortion.

Although one must question such morally reprehensible actions on the part of the Beauforts, the episode only served to demonstrate the pressure the king's men were under in 1415 to amass the necessary funding Henry needed for his costly enterprise. The Italian merchants, for their part, were not as forthcoming as the brothers wished, and 'because they refused to lend such sums to our lord the king, they were committed to the custody of the Fleet Prison'.[18] The Beauforts may have acted ruthlessly, even dishonourably, but it was precisely the type of industriousness and willingness to follow orders that made the pair indispensable to the king.

As preparations for the invasion had reached an advanced stage,

on 30 June, several French ambassadors arrived in Winchester for a final round of peace talks with King Henry. The meeting took place within Bishop Beaufort's palace of Wolvesey, and unsurprisingly the wise chancellor assumed a key role in the proceedings. It was hardly in his character to take a back seat. The talks never came close to producing an amicable outcome and were pointless from the outset. In fact, the situation swiftly deteriorated to the point that a French envoy insulted King Henry by insinuating he was not the rightful king of England, much less the ruler of France. His uncle of Winchester furiously intervened and blurted out that if France truly wanted to avoid a costly and bloody war, they would immediately surrender Normandy, Anjou, Touraine, Poitou, Maine and Ponthieu, as well as the hand of Princess Katherine.[19]

The French ambassadors predictably refused to entertain such notions and, like their English counterparts earlier in the year, departed having accomplished nothing. On 5 August, from Southampton, King Henry wrote to Charles VI, 'his cousin and adversary of France', lamenting that whilst the 'noble kingdoms of England and France were formerly united, now they are divided'. He now intended to seek 'restitution of rights cruelly torn from us' and to reunify the two realms.[20] It was a formal declaration of war.

The army that assembled on the south coast was vast, with the earl of Dorset at its very core. The force comprised a wide range of men from all walks of life; it included those of a martial nature, such as men-at-arms with their pages and esquires, archers, pikemen and master gunners, as well as those with more practical skills such as miners, surgeons, carpenters, fletchers and bowyers. Household staff such as clerks and servants were present, as well as deans and chaplains to cater for any religious needs. A band of trumpeters, pipers and minstrels were also recruited, charged with entertaining the battle-weary troops at the end of tough days. Each captain appointed for the expedition, including Dorset, had to negotiate a contract with the king to provide a certain number of men, for which they would be remunerated as per the terms stipulated at the council meeting in April. In the event that the king did not return from the

campaign alive, he drew up his will, appointing, among others, Henry Beaufort, Thomas Beaufort and Ralph Neville as executors.[21]

Just before the army embarked, a plot to murder King Henry was uncovered and threatened to derail the entire campaign. On 31 July, Edmund Mortimer, the twenty-three-year-old earl of March, informed the king of a conspiracy led by his brother-in-law Richard, earl of Cambridge and younger brother of the duke of York. March pleaded innocence, claiming to have informed the king as soon as he became aware of the scheme, and within a week Cambridge was on the chopping block, along with his fellow conspirators Henry Scrope, 3rd Baron Scrope of Masham, and Sir Thomas Grey. On 11 August, the army, with Thomas Beaufort among the ranks, finally sailed for France.

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The English landed three days later at Chef de Caux on the Seine estuary, and within days had surrounded the port town of Harfleur, which was besieged 'by londe and by watir'.[22] The siege proved more difficult than anticipated, and involved the use of underground mines and heavy-duty siege equipment. According to Adam of Usk's account, King Henry relentlessly 'shook the city and the walls with his engines and cannons',[23] while the *Croyland Chronicle* reported that Harfleur was 'vigorously attacked by throwing into it immense masses of stone', as though the English were 'playing with the Frenchmen at the game commonly known as tennis'.[24] It was a destructive tactic that gradually devastated the town.

The five-week siege concluded on 23 September 1415 when the beleaguered citizens were unable to withstand the onslaught any longer. It was a bittersweet moment for the English, who had lost many men from dysentery, the feared and often fatal 'bloody flux', which had spread through the ranks. Casualties included the bishop of Norwich and the earls of Suffolk and Arundel, while the royal duke of Clarence also fell ill and was forced to return to England to recover. It was anticipated the French would attempt to retake the town at the

earliest opportunity, and so the king turned to 'his very dear uncle' Dorset and installed him as captain, armed 'with a sufficient staff of people' to ensure Harfleur remained in English hands.[25] Any citizen who swore an oath of fealty to the English king was permitted to remain, and even join the garrison, but otherwise Dorset was ordered to 'put out alle the Frensch people, both man, woman and chylde, and stuffe the toun with Englischmen'.[26] Thomas Beaufort may have had reservations about such a ruthless order, but ultimately, as a loyal subordinate, he knew his duty. His apprenticeship had been served a decade earlier when he was captain of Ludlow. The French, however, would prove a far greater threat to his safety than Welsh guerrillas.

On 8 October, after a suitable period of rest, the king and his army left Dorset behind with a small contingent and marched through Normandy towards Calais, intending to seek refuge in the English-controlled territory for the forthcoming winter. They were shadowed much of the way by a larger French force, and the two armies eventually came face to face on 24 October near the villages of Agincourt and Tramecourt. The French had strategically barred the road to Calais, only forty miles north, and the tired, starving and ill English army had little option but to fight their way through. On the following morning, the feast day of St Crispin, the two forces clashed on a boggy Picard field, with the English securing an extraordinary victory against all expectation.

King Henry, 'brave and like a very lion',[27] only had around 1,500 men-at-arms at his disposal, but did have roughly 7,000 longbowmen, each of whom was deadly with his chosen weapon. A well-trained archer was capable of dispatching a dozen arrows a minute, and with thousands of archers utilised at any one time, the result was often tens of thousands of arrows falling from the skies into enemy ranks. The French cavalry and men-at-arms, weighed down by their armour, had fatally misjudged the conditions of the field and faltered in the mud, where they were picked off by the archers. Once their supplies had been exhausted, the archers courageously threw down their bows and fought 'lustily with swords, hatches, mallets and bill hooks, slaying all before them'.[28]

It was a bloody massacre on an epic scale, with French casualties numbering in the thousands. An entire generation of France's nobility was wiped out in one morning, with three dukes, eight counts, a viscount and an archbishop butchered, along with France's admiral and constable. The English, by contrast, suffered minimal casualties, although two notable deaths were those of Edward, duke of York, and Michael de la Pole, the earl of Suffolk who had only inherited his title a few weeks earlier after his father's death outside Harfleur.

As King Henry's army wearily marched on to Calais, news of his spectacular victory reached London on 29 October, with details proclaimed to the citizens from the steps of St Paul's Cathedral. That same day, Bishop Beaufort led a service of thanksgiving in the cathedral while *Te Deum* were sung in churches throughout the city. Henry triumphantly entered London on 23 November, having first stopped to offer his own thanksgiving at the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury, next to which were the graves of his father Henry IV and uncle John Beaufort. The king had left England as the son of a usurper and target of an assassination plot from his own subjects. He returned a conquering hero, the great victor of Agincourt, proudly championed by his jubilant commons. The events that took place on one single morning in Picardy did as much for Lancastrian legitimacy on the throne of England as the previous fifteen years combined. Although neither Henry nor Thomas Beaufort had been present on the battlefield, after their labours fending off several rebellions in the previous reign they could not have failed to appreciate this reversal of fortune.

In the short-term, however, Dorset had much to preoccupy himself with in Harfleur, although he was ably assisted by his deputies Thomas Carew, John Blount and John Fastolf, the latter the inspiration for Shakespeare's cowardly Falstaff character, in name if not character. The earl's directive was to establish Harfleur as a second Calais, providing the English an alternative gateway into France. To this end, he was provided with 300 men-at-arms and 900 archers. Exchequer records dated up to 31 December 1415 show that early attempts were made during the bleak winter months to provide

supplies for the town's rebuilding, with flour and wine specifically provided to nourish hundreds of miners, labourers, carpenters and smiths. Orders were also dispensed for Harfleur to be provided with oxen, sheep, pigs and fish.[29] Nonetheless, the Harfleur project, just like Calais, habitually suffered from underfunding, and Thomas experienced many of the same problems as his brother John encountered a decade earlier.

English migration into the town was encouraged, with property seized from the inhabitants and existing ownership deeds burnt to convince settlers to cross the Channel. It was a fanciful idea; despite the 1,200-strong garrison, Harfleur remained vulnerable to attack and was a dangerous outpost in hostile territory. It may have been directly across the water from the English south coast, but the distance was considerably greater than that between Dover and Calais. Dorset and his men were entirely reliant on provisioning from ports such as Southampton and Portchester, but supplies proved to be unreliable with ships regularly harassed by French fleets. The earl clearly had his work cut out for him.

On 25 November, the Council appointed two men to cross to Harfleur and report on the state of the town, paying particular attention to the condition of the artillery. The commissioners, William Loveney and Gere Flour, were ordered to convey a payment of £3,640 to the earl for the wages of the garrison, although it was specifically stipulated the money was expected to cover the expenses of a thousand oats for the horses.[30] Although the funding was not insignificant, the money did not stretch far. Dorset had to be resourceful in his duty as captain, holding together a demotivated and hungry garrison while maintaining the fragile peace between his English soldiers and the French residents. He also had to be tough and disciplined, if calm and composed under pressure. He also had to be approachable and compassionate, and open to compromise if the situation called for it. It took a well-rounded and respected individual to fulfil the position, and that Dorset was selected over any other noble suggests the king had ample confidence in his uncle's ability to succeed.

Dorset's unenviable task must have prompted his rash expedition in March 1416 when he led a hardy force out of Harfleur in search of food and supplies. Although funding continued to be provided intermittently from London, with the earl having spent Christmas 1415 in the capital petitioning the king in person, by the spring the garrison was noticeably short of weaponry and food. On 9 March, Dorset took matters into his own hands, and with a thousand men, including his deputy Carew and a Gascon knight named Jenico d'Artois, marched out of the town. The raiding party headed north-east and swiftly sacked the small town of Cany before they were spotted by a passing French patrol near Ouainville. When Dorset and his soldiers reached Valmont later in the day, it was not further food and supplies the English found but rather a formidable French army led by the count of Armagnac.

Thomas Beaufort was a skilled soldier with more than a decade of experience in the field, and would have prepared to encounter a degree of resistance once he passed through the gateway out of Harfleur. Nonetheless, the grim reality of confronting Armagnac's superior force must have been distressing. With little recourse, Dorset set his men into a defensive formation and valiantly repelled several thundering cavalry charges, prompting the French monk of St Denys to note how 'in spite of the surprise which an unexpected attack always causes even the most intrepid hearts, the English resisted stoutly'.[31]

However stout the resistance, the French gradually broke the through the weakened English ranks, and Dorset, possibly wounded in the process, ordered his men to retreat into the ditches around the Valmont city walls.[32]. Armagnac's troops tried in vain to persuade the English to surrender without incurring further bloodshed, yet Dorset stood firm. It has been suggested the patriotic earl rebuked his tormentors, urging a French herald to 'tell your master that Englishmen do not surrender!'[33] and such an acerbic response seems in keeping with what we know of Beaufort's bold character, although no contemporary source seems to corroborate the outburst. Such courage failed to prevent the French from ransacking Dorset's baggage

train, however, and Armagnac's soldiers spirited away the military supplies and food the English had accrued during their risky excursion out of Harfleur.

Having lost several men and horses during the skirmish, Dorset astutely recognised he risked catastrophe should he further commit his men. With surrender unthinkable, the earl withdrew his army from the ditches under the cover of darkness and sought refuge in the surrounding countryside, fleeing east towards Fécamp and passing through the Le Loges woodland until reaching Étretat. After a hard, twenty-mile slog along the coast, the English rounded the Cap de la Hève until they came into sight of the Seine estuary. With the safe confines of Harfleur in the distance, a second French army under the command of Marshal Louis de Loigny appeared on the scene, much to the dismay of the exhausted English soldiers.

Fortuitously for Dorset, the French proved rash in their attempts to get at his men and misjudged the steep decline towards their wilting foe. The English fought with every ounce of strength remaining in their tired bodies, and succeeded in cutting their way through the disorderly French ranks and into Harfleur, stopping only to strip the dead of anything useful. From start to end, Dorset's mission was a failure, from which he was lucky to escape with his life. Desperate men, however, resort to desperate measures, and based on recent actions, the earl was clearly a desperate man.

Although the series of clashes, later known as the Battle of Valmont, were perceived in England as a morale-boosting triumph over the French, for Dorset the situation remained perilous. While Adam of Usk wrote in his chronicle how the earl had 'slew of the French who assaulted him to the number of two thousand',[34] Dorset was also busy writing, in his case a passionate letter to the Council pleading for assistance.

The letter, dated 14 April 1416, reminded the Council he had frequently written requesting aid, particularly regarding artillery for the continued defence of the town. Dorset complained he had lost many horses, presumably alluding to the Valmont campaign, and

owing to the harsh conditions explained how his men were in great need of foodstuffs, particularly corn and meat. The earl tersely added that without such supplies forthcoming, he might be forced to depart his post, a situation unthinkable to the king. Whether Dorset's threat was genuine is unclear, but he was clearly a man under severe strain, personally responsible for a starving and vulnerable garrison that could conceivably turn their ire on the beleaguered earl at any point. With anger barely concealed by his words, Dorset made it clear he was disappointed by his treatment, and was therefore dispatching his treasurer Thomas Barneby, victualler Reginald Curteys and Sir John Scudamore to London to plead with the king and council on his behalf.[35]

The letter accomplished its objective; Curteys was handed £2,000 and provided with beer and wheat, while a follow-up shipment of supplies was promised, to consist of 1,000 bows, 2,000 arrow trusses, 100 crossbows, 200 barrels of honey, 100 beef tarts, 2,000 bacon tarts, and unspecified amounts of corn, beer, malt, oats, peas, beans, vinegar, unsalted fish and sea coal.[36] Harfleur was better provisioned in future, and remained safely in English hands for the next two decades, only falling to the French in 1435. If it wasn't for Dorset's tenacious command in the winter of 1415 and the following spring, the occupation would have lasted less than a year.

In October 1416, parliament assembled in Westminster, with the main objective to secure further funding for the continuation of the war in France. Bishop Beaufort was again responsible for putting forward the king's case, prudently timed to coincide with the one-year anniversary of Agincourt. Henry opened proceedings with a decidedly patriotic speech, declaring the famous victory the previous year to have been the will of God. The assembled lords were implored to provide the king with the money he needed to continue fighting the wicked French, who had shown little willingness to come to terms. It was a renewed call for war, and the wily chancellor was nothing if not persuasive, with parliament pledging a double subsidy of taxation.

On 18 November, as parliament neared its conclusion, Thomas

Beaufort received public recognition for his efforts when, due to 'his service to the king and the realm on both sides of the seas', he was elevated to the dukedom of Exeter for the remainder of his natural life, to be supplemented with an annuity of £1,000.[37] If he harboured any resentment over his treatment by king and council while stranded in Harfleur, then a dukedom was surely an ample appeasement. As Dorset became Exeter, he was raised to a status few nobles in the land could ever hope to attain. In fact, at the time of Thomas's elevation, there were only three other dukes in the kingdom, namely Clarence, Gloucester and Bedford, all of whom were the king's brothers. If there was any doubt of the esteem in which Thomas Beaufort was now held by his fellow peers, Walsingham noted how some questioned whether the annual income of £1,000 provided with his dukedom was enough, feeling it was not 'commensurate with the merits of so great a man'.[38] This may explain why Exeter was granted the keeping of the nine-year-old earl of Oxford John de Vere on 25 May 1417. Although the duke was charged with maintaining the de Vere estates, any profits from the various castles, houses and woodlands associated with the Oxford earldom, including the colossal Hedingham Castle in Essex, significantly enhanced his income.[39]

The dukedom capped a remarkable rise for Thomas, particularly considering he had been the youngest son of an illegitimate brood. His father may have been the richest nobleman in England, but Thomas had always been last in line when it came to handouts. Connections because of his parentage certainly played a part in his opportunities as a young man but, as he grew older, it was his actions, his temperament and his ability that enabled him to succeed in any task he was given. From captain to admiral, and from chancellor to earl, he had always proved competent, reliable and trustworthy. Just short of his fortieth birthday, Thomas Beaufort had earned the right to be called duke.

Konstanz, Rouen and Troyes 1417–1420

The war in France was given renewed impetus in early 1417 by Henry V's resolve to continue campaigning across the Channel until he had forced the French into surrendering their throne into England's hands. His ambitions were never going to be satisfied with intermittent displays of martial strength in northern France, and Henry yearned to bring his adversary to heel in a way last threatened by his great-grandfather Edward III. The king's strategy was to first conquer Normandy, which he considered his rightful inheritance through his descent from an earlier duke, William the Conqueror, and which had been held by English kings until Henry III rescinded his claim in 1259. Henry V now prioritised its recapture as a matter of personal honour. It didn't hurt, of course, that geographically Normandy also provided a logical base from which to penetrate further into France.

With further funding secured, owing to the efforts of Chancellor Henry Beaufort during the October 1416 parliament, a considerable army departed Southampton in late July 1417 and landed south of the Seine estuary at Touques. By 18 August the royal army was camped outside Caen, nine miles inland and dominated by a formidable castle on a rocky outcrop overlooking the town. Monstrelet considered Caen to be a 'very strong and populous'[1] settlement, encircled by defensive walls and divided into two distinct settlements by the River Orne. It was recognised across the Continent as a town of great renown, second only to Rouen in Normandy and particularly noted for its widely acclaimed limestone. For good reason, the English king had identified Caen as his potential headquarters for the foreseeable future. He just had to capture it.

The town possessed two abbeys erected on the orders of William the Conqueror, the Abbaye aux Homes on the west side of town and

the Abbaye aux Dames in the east, but King Henry captured both with relative ease and set up camp in one while his brother Clarence was dispatched to the other. Together, the brothers of Lancaster besieged Caen on two fronts, bombarding the city walls with their cannons and attempting to pummel the citizens into submission. Conducive to their task was that both abbeys had fortifications significantly higher than those of the town, allowing the English soldiers to fire their weapons directly into the streets, causing outbreaks of panic and confusion among the beleaguered inhabitants. It was only a matter of time before the gates were opened to Henry and his men, and on 8 September, less than a month after their arrival, the English army triumphantly entered the streets of Caen with the castle grudgingly submitting a fortnight later.

From Caen, the core English army marched south and swiftly seized the towns of Argentan and Alençon, while Clarence travelled north and captured the towns of Bayeux and Lisieux. It was systematic annexation that continued after Christmas, with Falaise, birthplace of the Conqueror, captured in February 1418 followed by Pont-de-l'Arche in June. The reconquering of Normandy, as King Henry viewed it, was underway.

While the king, Thomas Beaufort and the flower of English nobility were engaged in France, Bishop Beaufort was preoccupied with a campaign of his own. In the summer of 1417, the chancellor indicated he wished to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, apparently eager to follow in the crusading footsteps of his half-brother Henry IV. The king assented to his uncle's appeal, and on 21 July 1417 a general request was issued for letters of safe conduct to be produced for the bishop of Winchester to traverse a number of lands between London and Jerusalem, some of which may have proved hostile to a wandering English prelate of royal blood. Two days later, Henry formally resigned the chancellorship, handing it to Thomas Langley, bishop of Durham, and settled his administrative affairs in the kingdom ready for his departure in the middle of August 1417.[2]

By early September the bishop was in Bruges, having completed

the first stage of his journey. Outwardly, all appeared to be a conventional voyage of faith. Henry Beaufort was not overly pious, however, and to suddenly yearn to walk in the footsteps of Christ was out of character for a bishop who had hitherto focused on secular rather than spiritual matters. The actual reason for his sudden trip overseas soon became evident, and although concerning a religious issue, Henry's involvement was strictly political.[3]

Since 1414, an ecclesiastical council based in Konstanz had brought together the Continent's most learned religious minds with the intention to end the bitter Papal Schism which had divided Christendom for almost forty years, a conflict rooted in political rather than theological origins. In recent years three bishops had simultaneously claimed to be the legitimate pontiff, making a mockery of the holy office. Each candidate received the backing of various countries across Europe, which often changed depending on the prevailing geopolitical situation. Predictably, France and England took opposing stances.

The council was conducted under the guiding hand of Sigismund, King of the Romans, and had already overseen the resignation of popes John XXIII and Gregory XII in 1415 and the excommunication of the third claimant Benedict XIII after he refused to follow suit. Most of 1417 was spent debating whether Church reform or the election of a unanimously supported pope should take precedence, and once general opinion favoured a papal election, King Henry wanted to ensure that any prospective pontiff would be accommodating to England's political needs. The decision was duly taken to dispatch his ablest servant to Konstanz to add gravitas to the struggling English delegation, and that servant was the sagacious figure of Henry Beaufort.

The assignment suited the bishop, not the type of man to shirk from such responsibility. With the king and most of the nobility about to depart to France on campaign, Henry probably had little desire to remain in England twiddling his thumbs in their absence. Just as his brother Thomas sought glory and honour in Normandy with his

sword, Henry was determined to do likewise in Konstanz with his words. Any prospective papal election was being delayed by Sigismund's preference for reform, and Bishop Beaufort's task was to impart some timely advice to the stubborn King of the Romans on behalf of the English monarch, who desired an election sooner rather than later. Shortly after the persuasive bishop's arrival from Ulm at the start of October, Sigismund backed down, prompting the much-anticipated election to finally commence. Bishop Beaufort was even considered a candidate for the papacy, which, considering his ambitious nature, he probably did little to discourage. Despite any pretentions Henry may have had, however, an English selection was never likely to gain much wide support, and on 11 November the Italian Oddo Colonna was elected as Martin V.

The new pope was keen to reward those who had sponsored his election, and as head of the English delegation, Henry was well placed for such treatment. On 18 December 1417, the wily bishop received his highest honour to date when he was elevated to the cardinalate, a prestigious promotion that must have caused great celebration among the bishop's entourage. To become a cardinal was to wield extraordinary influence in the Church, benefitting from personal favour with the Holy Father and raised above all other ecclesiastical figures save for fellow cardinals. It was a momentous occasion for Henry Beaufort, and with little appetite for an English pope, was probably the highest rung he could expect to climb in the church. There was a catch, however.

In addition to the promise of a cardinal's hat, Pope Martin also conferred upon the bishop of Winchester the title of *legate a latere* and the right to hold his bishopric *in commendam*, exempt from the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Canterbury. Put simply, Henry had been granted full powers to act in the name of the pope, answerable to no other ecclesiastical or secular figure in England and contentiously empowered to tax the English Church on behalf of the papacy. It was a glaring conflict of interest; Henry could not serve two masters.

The new cardinal, perhaps appreciating the awkward discussion

that awaited him once his nephew received notice of his appointment, chose to continue with his interrupted pilgrimage, arriving in Venice on 20 March 1418 and lodging at the Benedictine monastery of San Giorgio. Using his ample experience as a negotiator of the finest calibre, Henry secured a galley named the *Querina* for himself and eight other pilgrims, and on 10 April set sail for Jerusalem, leaving his dilemma in Europe behind.[4]

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Having received news of his uncle's promotion to the cardinalate, King Henry turned over the news in his head and deliberated on the best course of action. If Pope Martin published the Papal Bull confirming Bishop Beaufort's elevation, the king faced the prospect that one of his subjects was outside his jurisdiction, operating in the interests of Rome rather than England. This was unacceptable to a king as autocratic as Henry V, spurred on by the complaints of Henry Chichele, the incensed archbishop of Canterbury who viewed his Beaufort's appointment as an affront to his own status. Chichele had a valid point; how could the See of Winchester be subservient to Canterbury, but its bishop not? It was a political quagmire that threatened to undermine the most powerful cleric in the land, not to mention the king.

On 6 March 1418, Chichele outlined his opposition in a grave letter reminding King Henry that papal legates only came into England 'to the great oppression of your people', urging him to take the matter 'tenderly at heart and see that the state of the church be maintained and sustained'.[5] While the king was in agreement, a confrontation would need to wait, as Bishop Beaufort was out of reach while the king was otherwise preoccupied with his gruelling military campaign in France.

By the summer of 1418, the king's army was camped outside the gates of Rouen, the final obstacle in reconquering the duchy. Although the city was the second largest in France, it had suffered from the intermittent civil war between the Armagnac and Burgundian factions

and had been brutally occupied by both forces. Now it was to be harassed once more, this time by the English.

In mid-July King Henry dispatched his uncle Thomas Beaufort to seek the city's surrender, accompanied by 'a fayre manye of men of arms and archers'. The duke of Exeter had spent the first few months of the year in England but on 3 March received a summons from his nephew requesting his services again in France. By May the duke was back on Norman soil, attended by a force of 500 men-at-arms and 1,500 archers, and on 1 July was created count of Harcourt after capturing the town's castle. He was also given custody of Lillebonne Castle, situated halfway between Harfleur and Rouen, and timely motivation for the exhausting task that lay ahead.[6]

According to the *Brut Chronicle,* on arriving outside Rouen, Exeter set up camp and 'displayed his banner' before sending 'herodes into the toun, and bade them to yeld it'. If they chose not to submit, then the duke promised they would 'deie an harde and sharped deth, and withoute eny mercy or grace'. A small skirmish occurred when 'a grete meny of men at arms, both on horsbak and eke on foot' emerged from the town, although Exeter's resilient force managed to 'ovirthew an hep of them', capturing thirty prisoners in the process.[7] It was clear the Rouennais were not going to yield to the duke, who promptly departed south to Pont-de-l'Arche to inform his king. An unimpressed Henry V swiftly mobilised the remainder of his troops and returned to Rouen alongside his uncle.

The siege began in earnest on 29 July 1418, with the city well defended by large numbers of crossbowmen and artillery weaponry. English siege equipment, which had proved effective throughout the campaign, was rendered useless as Henry's soldiers could not get within range of the city walls to create any discernible damage. Since brute force was not an option, the king resolved to starve the citizens into surrender. Henry spread his commanders around the city to block any attempts by French relief forces bringing supplies; he based himself in the east and his brother Clarence in the west. Exeter was positioned 'on the north syde, before the Port Denys', and the three

chief commanders were capably supported by John Mowbray, earl of Norfolk, James Butler, earl of Ormond, the lords Harrington, Talbot, Roos, Willoughby and Fitzhugh, and Sir John Cornwallis.[8]

The English expected the Rouennais to surrender after a token resistance, while those within the walls stubbornly awaited the arrival of a French army to come to their rescue. Neither occurred. Although outbreaks of dysentery and disease afflicted both Rouen and the English camp, commanders of both sides refused to back down. At one stage, an Englishman known as Sir John le Blanc, Governor of Harfleur and a member of Exeter's retinue, challenged a French captain named Langnon, the bastard of D'Arly, to a jousting duel. Langnon agreed to the contest and emerged from the beyond the walls with around thirty companions. Although the intention of both men was to run the joust three times, Langnon ferociously unhorsed his adversary at the first attempt, who was then dragged into the city where he succumbed to his injuries. The Frenchman was urged by the English to return le Blanc's lifeless body, for which he was begrudgingly paid four hundred nobles, possibly from the purse of a presumably demoralised Exeter himself.[9]

By December, the citizens of Rouen were feeling the effect of the siege, having consumed most of their provisions. By Christmas they had 'nothir bred, ale, nor wyne' and were forced to survive on horsemeat and the flesh of dogs, mice, rats and cats.[10] The city's despairing commanders ordered all women and children, with any old or sick men, to be evicted from Rouen at once as they were deemed to be of no military value. Considering many of those expelled were related to soldiers left behind, it seems likely the commanders intended for them to be honourably received into English hands as prisoners of war, to be fed and watered until the siege was over. They had not counted on the ruthless disposition of the English king.

Although several of King Henry's soldiers initially endeavoured to feed the evictees from their own rations, he dispatched orders that no assistance was to be provided to the pleading masses. His command was adhered to, and the beleaguered citizens were left to starve in

ditches halfway between the English and the city walls, slowly perishing in full view of both camps. It was an utterly brutal decision and intended to demotivate the watching garrison of Rouen, who could only look on shamefacedly as those they had expelled screamed for help that was not forthcoming.

A chilling insight into the horrors of the siege is found in a lengthy poem written by John Page, an English soldier present during the sustained attack. Page's compassionate poem barely conceals the anguish he experienced during the winter of 1418, or the significant pity he felt for the innocent women and children of Rouen. In one resonating couplet, Page records how he witnessed a starving, orphaned 'chylde of two yere or three, go a boute to begge hyt brede, fadyr and modyr bothe were dede', while he also came across 'women holdyn in hyr armys, dede chyldryn in hyr barmys (bosoms)'. After the citizens were expelled, a despondent Page noted how 'women with their children in their arms' were begging the soldiers to 'have marcy uppon us, ye Englysche men'.[11]

There could be no mercy until the English king was placated and as Rouen could not withstand the tenacious monarch indefinitely, dialogue was finally opened between the two parties after Christmas. The city accepted terms of surrender on 19 January 1419 when, after six months of 'toilsome siege and many assaults',[12] Thomas Beaufort was handed the keys to Rouen. The duke galloped into the city, 'a valiant captain mounted on a goodly courser',[13] to formally seek the submission of the council. Trumpets, clarions and pipes heralded the duke's arrival, with his English soldiers, perhaps charged with adrenaline, provocatively shouting 'St George! St George!' as they passed through the gates. Page reported the inhabitants were but 'bonys and skyn'[14] and beheld their conquerors with great fear, prompting some of the residents to nervously ransom their lives 'for fifty thousand pounds in gold'.[15] Money was not enough to save a commander named Alain Blanchard; he was promptly executed for having hanged English prisoners from the walls in preceding months.

One can only wonder at the horror that greeted the duke as he

rode through the disease-plagued, death-infested streets. Rotting corpses littered the roads, with Page confirming 'in everyche strete lay dede' while those who had only just survived the ordeal 'dyde faster than cartys myght cary away'. The stench alone must have overwhelmed Exeter and his men, forced to navigate their way through grim pandemonium. Even so, Thomas had a duty to perform, and so the duke 'to the castelle fyrste he roode' and 'ryche baners up he set', including those of St George and the arms of France and England.[16] As the flags fluttered in the wind, their presence above the city represented not only a hard-fought English victory over Rouen, but also the duchy of Normandy.

With Exeter having secured the city, the king followed his uncle into Rouen the following afternoon, and while 'the bells of all the churches were rung', the surviving ecclesiastical figures emerged to greet the intimidating figure that had reduced their places of worship to rubble.[17] Alongside his commanders, Henry offered thanksgiving in the cathedral before settling into his new lodgings within the castle. His nobles dispersed into the city to find accommodation in any buildings English cannons had failed to destroy.

Exeter finally had the opportunity to rest his weary body, and to reflect on events of previous months, particularly the waste of life that had occurred on both sides of Rouen's walls. Tragic losses had not been limited to the Normans, for death had also struck at the heart of the Beaufort family. Accompanying his stepfather Clarence on the campaign had been the seventeen-year-old Henry Beaufort, 2nd Earl of Somerset, heir of John Beaufort, and Exeter's nephew. Information about the youngster's life is scarce, although his upbringing was overseen by Clarence and partly funded by his namesake uncle, the bishop of Winchester.

Young Henry's death is likewise poorly documented, although later inquisitions in the summer of 1425 place the date of his demise to 25 November 1418, just as the siege of Rouen reached its climax.[18] It's unclear whether the cause was warfare or disease, or if his uncle Exeter was present at the time having been posted near to the

Clarence forces in which the teenage earl served. There is no record of what happened to Henry's body. His earldom passed to his brother John who became the third Beaufort to hold the Somerset title within a decade. At what point Bishop Beaufort, or the boy's mother Margaret Holland, became aware of his demise is also uncertain, as is his final resting place. This Henry Beaufort remains an enigma, something of a lost Beaufort, and his death was a sad consequence of the fall of Rouen.

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Henry V had little desire to inflict further damage on Rouen, and set about restoring the devastation his protracted attack had caused by reconstructing the walls and rebuilding the houses. His men were dispatched to supply the Rouennais who had sworn their fealty with food and drink, intending to revitalise the men so they could serve him once recovered. The city was not envisioned to be a short-term capture and remained in English hands until 1449, a period of thirty years. If Harfleur in 1415 had been a strategic gateway into Normandy, then Rouen in 1419 was the gateway to Paris and all of France north of the Loire. Its importance to the success of the English campaign could not be overstated. What Henry needed in the interim was a reliable and respected captain to oversee the city's occupation, and like Harfleur four years earlier, he turned to his dependable uncle Exeter.

There is little doubt Thomas Beaufort took pride in his new role, just one of several offices and titles he possessed as he moved further into his forties. A letter written by the duke on 21 April 1419 from Vernon, roughly halfway between Rouen and Paris, for example was signed:

> The Duc of Excetre, Erle of Dorset and of Harecourt, Admiral of Englond, Guienne and Irland and Captain of Rouen.[19]

It was a splendid array of titles, but with such positions came wide-

ranging responsibility, and the letter itself underlined just how much Thomas had on his plate. He may have been regularly stationed on the front line in France since 1412, but, as admiral, it was inevitable his attention was occasionally required elsewhere.

The recipient of the missive was Bishop Thomas Langley, chancellor of England and a long-time acquaintance of the Beauforts. Their familiarity is evident in the lengthy and warm introduction, where the duke refers to Langley as his 'entierly welbeloved and trusty frende', who he greeted 'with alle myn hert'. The letter is concerned with the actions of three merchants of Bristol who had been detained for their unlawful seizure of a Breton vessel, contrary to the king's truce with the duke of Brittany. Exeter mentioned he had already ordered his deputy John Holland, earl of Huntingdon and his half-sister Elizabeth of Lancaster's son, to convey the vessel back into Breton hands, and was writing to ensure the chancellor was aware of his orders. The authoritative tone of the letter, and the ease at which the duke dispenses orders to the more senior Langley, suggest Exeter had no qualms in taking command of a situation, a decidedly Lancastrian trait. He was a born leader, in this instance acting with commendable decisiveness to prevent any potentially inconvenient diplomatic issues.

Exeter was reunited with his chastised brother Henry shortly before the letter was transcribed, the bishop of Winchester having recently returned from his voyage across Europe and the Middle East. Henry had returned to Venice from his pilgrimage in October 1418, when one of his first orders had been to arrange for the transportation of substantial quantities of timber to Bodrum to aid the construction of the Knights Hospitallers' vast fortress overlooking the Ceramic Gulf.[20]

It seems likely Henry had personally visited the site, located on the western tip of modern-day Turkey, or at the very least had met a petitioner from the city, prompting his involvement in providing supplies. An English division of the knights were based in Bodrum and responsible for the construction of a crenellated three-storeyed

fortification on the south-west of the fortress, completed in 1413. It seems probable the generous supply of timber on behalf of the bishop was for their benefit.

Of greater concern to Henry, however, was his discovery that the king had voiced opposition to the bishop's promotion to the cardinalate. Henry arrived at the papal court in Mantua at the end of October and it quickly became clear his elevation had been halted; the papal bull documenting his rise remained unpublished, and Henry was prohibited from taking his seat in the consistory, the traditional council of cardinals. Appreciative of his nephew's disgruntlement, Henry set out for the English camp as soon as he could, crossing the hazardous Alps during winter to reach the king in Normandy. He arrived in Rouen on 3 March 1419 and was honourably received, although his private welcome from the king was somewhat frostier.[21]

The bishop was informed his appointment to the cardinalate was contrary to the wishes of his king, and if he ever published copies of the papal bull in England then he would face charges of *praemunire*, the assertion of papal jurisdiction against the will of the monarch. The act was a controversial innovation of Richard II and punishment included the forfeiture of all titles, offices and wealth, a harsh penalty that alarmed the acquisitive bishop. The king had no issues with an English envoy serving his interests at the papal court, but not *vice versa*. The once close relationship between uncle and nephew, carefully cultivated since the king had been a precocious teenager, had become severely strained, even with Exeter's likely intervention on behalf of his under-fire sibling.[22] Only time would tell if it could be salvaged.

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Henry V was relentless in his pursuit of the French throne, and in the spring of 1419 attention turned to Paris and beyond. The French were more divided than ever, increasingly overrun in the north and facing the uninspiring accession of a dauphin ill-equipped to deal with the English threat. The sixteen-year-old French heir Charles was an

inferior figure to the battle-hardened force of nature that was Henry V, and thoughts undoubtedly turned to the inevitable confrontation between the pair down the line. Was the dauphin truly capable of defeating his English foe?

The Armagnac faction pledged to support the Frenchman in any eventuality, while the Burgundians elected to keep their options open. There was no suggestion that John the Fearless, the duke of Burgundy, had any intention of deposing the current monarch Charles VI in favour of the invading foreigner, but this fealty did not necessarily extend to his heir, the fifth successive son of the king to hold the dauphin title. King Henry seized on the uncertainty surrounding the character of the latest Valois heir, and once more pressed the issue of his marriage to Princess Katherine, the dauphin's older sister. The king of England was offering the French an alternative future under his rule.

On 1 June 1419, power was granted to Henry's leading nobles to seek a lasting peace with France. The group comprised the king's brothers Clarence and Gloucester, Henry Chichele, archbishop of Canterbury; Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick; and the king's uncles, Henry and Thomas Beaufort. The king counselled his representatives to pursue only one outcome: the entirety of the concessions agreed in the 1360 Treaty of Brétigny, plus the duchy of Normandy in absolute sovereignty and the hand of Princess Katherine.[23]

The talks were arranged to take place throughout June on a meadow in Meulan, conveniently situated between Paris and Rouen. Henry and his representatives were met by a French party led by Queen Isabeau and supported by the dukes of Burgundy and Brittany. Also present among the entourage was the queen's beautiful seventeen-year-old daughter Katherine, marking the first time Henry had come face to face with the attractive teenager touted as his potential bride. She was considered by Monstrelet to be 'very handsome, of high birth, and of the most engaging manners'[24] and was, in every aspect, the perfect royal bride.

A temporary enclosure was created on the meadow using wooden planks, with ditches on three sides providing security for the elite of Anglo-French nobility. The fourth side was bordered by the meandering Seine, which added a picturesque backdrop to the tense proceedings. The arena had several entrances, each of which was secured with three barriers to ensure only those of suitable rank could gain access to the two royal parties. Tents and pavilions littered the landscape, providing basic accommodation for the thousand or so men each side brought. It was a remarkable array of the wealthiest and most influential men in both kingdoms, charged with ending a destructive war which had raged for over four years.

King Henry approached the assembly from a position of strength, evident from his demands. He reiterated previous requests for the French to hand over lands he deemed his by right, also claiming the hand of Katherine with a dowry of 800,000 crowns. Such outlandish terms had once been absurd, but Henry's recent military progress transformed the situation. Although no agreement was reached, it became ominously clear to the French that Henry would never be content with just Normandy; he meant to become king of France, and if they didn't willingly give up the crown, then he would soon take it by force.

Shortly after the English king and his Beaufort uncles departed from Meulan, events were to further work to their advantage. The duke of Burgundy wasn't convinced by King Henry's argument, and arranged a meeting with the dauphin in Montereau on 10 September 1419 to settle their differences. The two men, accompanied by their closest advisors, met upon a barricaded bridge spanning the Seine, with armed troops on both banks observing the proceedings with unease. As Duke John knelt in front of the young prince, a member of the latter's retinue stepped forward and swung his axe into Burgundy's head, tearing off part of his chin before he was surrounded and brutally stabbed to death. The summit had been arranged under the pretence of diplomacy, but was nothing more than a premeditated assassination. The dauphin's reputation plummeted, however, amid accusations of murder, and by the end of the year Duke John's son

and successor Philip had negotiated a truce with the English, pledging full Burgundian support for King Henry's cause.[25]

Whether Henry V ever believed he would reach an agreement in which he would claim the French throne is debatable. His revered great-grandfather Edward III had, after all, tried and failed. Did Thomas Beaufort ever anticipate his nephew's enterprise would be successful, vindicating the horrors he had witnessed in Harfleur and Rouen, including the death of his brother John's teenage son Henry? Was Bishop Beaufort, who had diligently fended off complaints in parliament about the burden of taxation while chancellor, ever doubtful about the purpose of the campaign?

Any doubts the trio may have had, whether voiced in public or kept private, were dismissed on 20 May 1420, when the king and his army joyfully marched into the Burgundian-held town of Troyes to meet with Queen Isabeau and Philip of Burgundy. In St Peter's Cathedral the following day, King Henry and the queen, the latter on behalf of her ill husband Charles VI, signed and ratified the Treaty of Troyes.[26]

Unlike previous treaties, the Troyes document was not merely concerned with the ceding of land, but rather with the succession of the French throne itself. Henry, referred to in the text as Charles VI's 'very dear and well-beloved son Henry, king of England, heir and regent of France', was forthwith placed directly in the line of succession to the French crown, along with any heirs he would have with Princess Katherine, who would finally become his wife. Put simply, the dauphin had been ruthlessly disinherited by his parents in favour of his new brother-in-law. As the wax dried on the parchment, the novelty of the situation dawned on those present, including the Beauforts. After eighty years of conflict, the throne of France was no longer the unlikely aspiration of successive English monarchs and it was only a matter of time until Henry V of England also became Henri II of France, particularly as his aged father-in-law was in ill health. On 2 June, the cathedral was once more the setting for a momentous occasion when Henry married Katherine, again in the presence of

Henry and Thomas Beaufort.

Treaty and wedding celebrations notwithstanding, the military campaign had yet to reach its conclusion, as towns throughout France rallied to the cause of the disinherited dauphin. The remainder of 1420 was spent bringing Montereau and Melun to heel before attention turned to Paris, the largest metropolis in Europe and twice as populated as London. On 1 December, King Henry entered the city at the head of an illustrious Anglo-French cavalcade that included King Charles, the dukes of Burgundy, Clarence and Bedford, and both Beauforts. Monstrelet, who may have been among the crowds as a young man, later reported that 'a numerous band of the citizens of Paris came out to meet them in handsome array, and the streets were covered and ornamented with many rich cloths'.[27] Carols were sung, and free-flowing wine was drunk, as the procession worked its way through the heaving streets, terminating at Notre-Dame Cathedral where prayers of thanksgiving took place before the grand altar.

The following day, queens Isabeau and Katherine arrived in the city, receiving their own exuberant welcome from the Parisians. Although his brother-in-law Dauphin Charles refused to acknowledge the Treaty of Troyes and was amassing a force to resist its terms, Henry V of England now held most of the cards, certainly north of the Loire. Adam of Usk even wrote that the English king had 'made subject to his lordship, the king and queen of France and their daughter Katherine'.[28]

Henry's victory was not his alone. Men like Thomas Beaufort had fought courageously alongside their warrior king, and some had died for the cause, like the younger Henry Beaufort. Other Englishmen, meanwhile, such as the elder Henry Beaufort, had tirelessly canvassed for financial aid, risking their own reputations to accumulate the funding the king desperately needed. The French campaign had been a collaborative effort, built on the blood, sweat and tears of loyal men like the Beauforts, without whom Henry V could not have flourished in France.

A Time of Change
1421–1422

Once Christmas festivities in Paris and Rouen had been completed, and Henry V had settled his affairs in northern France, plans were initiated for his return to England after an absence of three years. He selected his brother Thomas, duke of Clarence, to oversee the English operation in France while Thomas Beaufort, duke of Exeter, was given the responsibility of guarding Charles VI in Paris, a task for which he was equipped 'with five hundred combatants'.[1] Queen Katherine accompanied her husband on his journey home and was crowned queen of England in Westminster Abbey on 23 February 1421. By March, she was pregnant with a son who stood to inherit two crowns, and with them two distinct kingdoms. On the surface, by the spring of 1421, all appeared well for the Lancastrian regime.

Although the Beauforts had revelled in the triumphant feats of their nephew – partly the result of their own assiduous exertions over the previous decade – Henry Beaufort remained somewhat out of favour with the king. The king had quashed his uncle's hopes of donning the scarlet cardinal's hat, and the bishop had soberly returned to England to keep a low profile in his diocese until he could regain his sovereign's good grace. Henry's fall from favour occurred as his battle-weary brother Thomas reached the pinnacle of his own career, roundly celebrated for his leading role in the French campaign and praised for the triumphs at Harfleur, Harcourt and Rouen. Exeter's position as one of the kingdom's foremost military commanders was established beyond reproach, a fact recognised when he was appointed captain of Paris in the king's absence from France.

The second generation of Beaufort men, the teenage sons of John Beaufort, the 1st Earl, had also begun to make their mark in France, continuing the family tradition of serving across the Channel. While

young Henry Beaufort, his father's initial successor to the Somerset title, had perished during the siege of Rouen on his first major campaign, his younger brothers proved more durable upon their introduction to warfare. John, the new earl, Thomas, and Edmund Beaufort all travelled to France in November 1419 to serve under their stepfather Clarence. In theory, there was no greater military education than to serve on the front lines of conflict, a tried and tested method used by the Lancastrians early in the reign of Henry IV when Clarence was posted to Ireland at the age of only fourteen and the current king given command in Wales at a similar age. Owing to their illustrious pedigree and close kinship to the king, the adolescent trio were knighted in Rouen during Christmas 1419 before experiencing their first siege at Melun in July 1420.[2] It was anticipated that, in time, they would develop into dependable soldiers in the mould of the two mentors in their life named Thomas, their stepfather Clarence and their uncle Exeter.

While the Beaufort boys slowly learnt the art of soldiery, Henry V was eager to impose his authority as heir and regent of France on those areas resisting the terms stipulated in the Treaty of Troyes. Although he was back in England for the foreseeable future, the king had empowered his brother Clarence to act in his stead, and the duke led a series of destructive raids throughout the countryside of Anjou and Maine. On 21 March 1421, Good Friday, Clarence's army, which included at least two of his Beaufort stepsons, was camped outside the town of Baugé, just over twenty miles east of Angers. Awaiting the English across a river was a larger French army loyal to the dauphin, bolstered by Scottish recruits under the command of John Stewart, earl of Buchan. The French contingent was led by Gilbert de Lafayette, the marshal of France.

Clarence determined that battle was a foregone conclusion, and launched a pre-emptive strike the following morning, anticipating his unexpected charge would nullify the superior numbers of the Franco-Scot army. His rash decision proved foolish. The duke crashed into the French lines with only a limited number of men-at-arms, and it wasn't long before they were overwhelmed, cut down and butchered. In the

middle of the dead was the bloodied and battered body of the thirty-four-year-old duke of Clarence, hacked down in his prime.

His impetuosity had not only cost him his life, but so too many loyal soldiers who had unflinchingly followed the king's brother into catastrophe. Edward Hall, writing more than a century later, aptly summarised Clarence's fatal error when he wrote how the duke 'desired honor and lost his life, he coveted victory and was overcome'.[3] Not every Englishman was killed. Among those fortunate to have been captured alive were the duke's Beaufort stepsons John and Thomas. It is unclear where Edmund was, although it is probable he was too young to be serving with the army at this juncture. After the heights of recent English successes on the Continent, events at Baugé were an unmitigated disaster, and highly unexpected.

One wonders how Bishop Beaufort received the news when messengers arrived in London with sad tidings of the disastrous defeat. His nephew Clarence, with whom he had not always seen eye to eye, was dead, while two more nephews, the elder sons of his brother John, were prisoners of the Dauphinists. Margaret Holland was also informed of the news, and could only have been devastated. Not only had she lost another husband, but the duchess was uncertain of the fate of two of her sons. Where were they being kept? Were they wounded? What was the likelihood they would be released? Were they to be executed? There were many questions, with few answers forthcoming. This episode came only a few years after the death of her eldest son Henry in Rouen, and it wouldn't be surprising if the dowager duchess openly cursed the French wars that had torn her family apart. The only upside for the Beaufort family in the aftermath of Baugé was financial; Clarence died childless, ensuring the Beaufort-Holland inheritance remained intact and invested in Margaret's sons with her first husband, John Beaufort. Of course, the only male member of the second generation of Beauforts still alive and at liberty after the battle was young Edmund Beaufort.

The king's response to the catastrophe was to muster an army capable of crushing the dauphin's resistance once and for all. Henry V

may not have always had an agreeable relationship with his spirited younger brother, but he nonetheless vowed to avenge Clarence's death. Strategically, the duke's defeat exposed the precarious position of the English along the Loire, and while Henry may have been secure in Normandy, it was clear many Frenchmen in the south were rejecting his authority. Of particular concern was his failure to receive ratification of the treaty from Pope Martin V, perhaps owing to their earlier confrontation over Bishop Beaufort's promotion to cardinal. Any goodwill the king had hoped to obtain by supporting the pope's election was not to be forthcoming.

Henry faced two significant issues as he sought to assemble yet another army to cross the Channel. As always, funding remained a contentious issue, while the English were now confronted with an enemy galvanised by events in Baugé, the first loss Henry had suffered in France. The king needed to deliver a strong response if he expected to retain his fragile grip on the hard-won territorial gains of the previous six months, but his latest expedition proved an arduous undertaking from the outset.

The wealthiest nobles in the land were brusquely petitioned yet again for loans, as were members of the lesser gentry and individual towns and villages. In total, £35,836 was raised from more than five hundred donors. Astonishingly, £14,000 of that total came from a single source; the wealthy bishop of Winchester, Henry Beaufort. To put the figure into context, the City of London was the second largest creditor, its sum of £2,000 comparing rather unfavourably with the bishop's.[4]

It's likely the astute bishop was attempting to repair his strained relationship with his royal nephew by buying his way back into favour using his extraordinary wealth, and it worked, for his latest loan reopened positive dialogue between the two men. Whether he appreciated the fact or not, the king had much to be grateful for when it came to his uncle, for the bishop's loan put the crown into Henry Beaufort's debt to the colossal sum of £22,306.[5] The payments may have been a shrewd investment by the bishop, but he wasn't

financially reckless, and so on 2 July took custody of the king's golden crown, adorned with rich jewels and enclosed in a leather casket, as a deposit for his unsurpassed loans.

On 9 June 1421, the king, having left behind his pregnant queen, sailed for France for what proved to be the final time, purposefully riding through his Norman dominion until he arrived in Paris to relieve his beleaguered uncle Thomas Beaufort. The duke of Exeter had struggled to quell growing resistance to his presence in the French capital, with Dauphinists encroaching on the city from multiple directions. On one occasion, at an unspecified date during his tenure as captain of Paris, Exeter had even been forced to suppress an uprising from within the walls.

An account in the work of French chronicler Monstrelet reported a skirmish that occurred after the duke, 'for certain reasons best known to himself, ordered the lord de l'Isle-Adam to be arrested by some of his English'. The Parisians were outraged, causing 'a thousand or more of the commonalty of Paris to rise in order to rescue him from those who were carrying him to the Bastille'. The lord in question was the popular Jean de Villiers, marshal of France and a distinguished soldier who may have crossed paths with Beaufort when he was captured during the siege of Harfleur in 1415.

The duke was forced to arrange for another 120 soldiers, 'the greater part of whom were archers', to assist their compatriots in escorting de Villiers through the streets of Paris to his cell. The Englishmen admonished those attacking them, loudly proclaiming they were acting on the orders of the French king, still under Exeter's control. The gradual realisation that the arrest was conceivably ordered by Charles VI was enough to persuade the troublemakers to disperse and the duke's harassed men belatedly completed their mission. Lord de Villiers was safely locked in the Bastille, the eight-towered fortress the English used as their prison in Paris, and remained there for the next two years.

Had Exeter truly been acting on the orders of the incapacitated king, or had he seen an opportunity to seize a political rival and acted

without hesitation? Either way, the operation was ultimately successful, with his men carrying out his order, albeit with unforeseen difficulty. It was this decisiveness under pressure which was precisely the type of quality that had endeared Thomas Beaufort to his king throughout the reign, and demonstrated why the duke had been so reliable in holding strategic towns like Harfleur, Rouen and Paris. He was proving to be indispensable to his nephew.

After observing the necessary formalities after Henry V's arrival in Paris, Exeter briefed the king, highlighting the troublesome areas that were either under Dauphinist control, or threatened from forces loyal to his disinherited brother-in-law. The king absorbed the intelligence he received from his uncle, rallied his troops for action, and by 18 July was barricading Dreux, with orders given for a detachment to relieve their besieged compatriots at Chartres. Not content with these minor victories, the king's attention turned towards Meaux, a provincially important town protected on three sides by the meandering River Marne.

At the end of September 1421, the king dispatched Exeter to the town with a substantial force numbering around four thousand men, armed with instructions to secure the suburbs that lay outside the walls. The English commanders had learnt their lesson from Rouen a few years earlier and sought to prevent the citizens from burning their own buildings to hinder the progress of Henry's army. It is unclear if Exeter was successful in his endeavour, but by 6 October, the main body of the English army had arrived on the scene and the siege of Meaux was begun.[7]

Much like Rouen, the town stubbornly resisted throughout the winter months, and even managed to inflict their own atrocities on their attackers. The young John Cornwall, a cousin of the Beauforts as son of John of Gaunt's daughter Elizabeth of Lancaster, was brutally decapitated by a cannonball fired from the town walls, having been stood next to his father Sir John Cornwall at the time. By the end of the year, however, as the siege continued to rage, the king's health was noticeably declining. Although unclear to the king's closest

advisors whether this physical downturn was due to fatigue or illness, it was a development that caused concern, albeit temporarily alleviated by news that Queen Katherine had safely delivered a healthy baby boy on 6 December at Windsor Castle. From his first breath the child was heir to England, and, as stipulated in the Treaty of Troyes, second in line to the throne of France after his father. The newborn represented the future of the House of Lancaster, much to the relief of the English commons who had grown increasingly concerned about the prospect of their warrior king dying without an heir.

The boy was christened shortly after his birth, with Bishop Beaufort standing as godfather alongside the king's brother, John of Bedford.[8] The heir was called Henry, a traditional Lancastrian name that belonged to the young prince's father, grandfather and Beaufort great-uncle. Henry V's beautiful French queen had not let her king down; first, she had brought to the marriage the prize of France, and now she provided him with a healthy heir that was primed to inherit all his hard-fought gains and become the greatest sovereign in Christendom.

It was March 1422 when Meaux finally surrendered, unable to resist the relentless English attacks any longer. Their walls were crumbling, their homes destroyed, and their people dying in numbers greater by the day. It had been a punishing five months, although a trumpeter had tried in vain to keep spirits high by intermittently blaring his defiance to the English soldiers from the town walls. As was becoming traditional, the king once more dispatched the faithful Exeter to arrange the formal surrender, and the duke, accompanied by the earl of Warwick and Sir Walter Hungerford, obligingly did his duty. The trumpeter would rue his foolish antics; King Henry, perhaps harshly, commanded his immediate execution, with the head spiked on a lance overlooking the marketplace while the body was hanged by the arms on a gibbet.[9] The English king was not a man to be mocked.

In the first week of April, plans were put in place for Bedford to sail to France with reinforcements for his brother, taking the

opportunity to escort the queen across the Channel to her homeland to see her husband and parents, and Bishop Beaufort, with Chancellor Thomas Langley, was appointed to inspect his nephew Bedford's troops, personally assessing the quality of the men-at-arms, archers and horses in the duke's retinue.[10] The bishop was expected to confirm that each captain had fulfilled the quotas agreed and that there was no attempt to receive payments for a service not provided, ensuring the crown was not being defrauded in any way. The gathering also conveniently provided the bishop an ideal opportunity to dispatch any last-minute messages or letters he needed to be taken across the Channel, perhaps even instructions or advice for his brother Exeter, to whom he was clearly close.

As spring gave way to summer, word spread through the English camp that the emaciated king was gravely ill, having possibly contracted dysentery during the recent siege. The king's health had deteriorated to such an extent he was no longer able to accompany his men on campaign, and was even reduced to riding in a litter. It was a devastating situation for this renowned warrior, and evoked memories of his great-uncle Edward, the Black Prince, another robust military figure incapacitated by illness before his time.

The arrival of Queen Katherine at the end of May, along with a lavish banquet in Paris to celebrate the feast of the Pentecost, had not been able to rally the king. Exeter was present for the festivities, and even as he ravenously gorged on the plentiful supply of meats and wine, his attention must surely have been distracted by the diminishing figure of his disease-ravaged nephew. If the king died, as was appearing likely, where would this leave the English position in France, of which Exeter was at the forefront? Notwithstanding any personal loss the duke would suffer as a result of Henry's death, politically it would be a catastrophe and it seems unlikely Exeter had not already initiated some form of clandestine arrangements for such an eventuality, perhaps in tandem with his meticulous churchman brother.

As August progressed, it became clear that Henry V was indeed on

the verge of death and all his leading nobles throughout English-held France were urgently ordered to his bedside, including Exeter who hurried to Château de Vincennes, a plush royal fortress a few miles to the east of Paris. The duke may even have been present at his nephew's deathbed inside the multi-storeyed *donjon* as prayers were said and psalms were sung for the king's soul.

On 31 August 1422, the prodigious war general and revered victor of Agincourt succumbed to his cruel illness, an ignominious end for a thirty-six-year-old who, like his father, had harboured dreams of leading a crusade to the Holy Land in his later days. This was a wish presumably known to his Beaufort relations, for one of the king's most cherished possessions in his final days was a book that belonged to his aunt Joan called *Les Cronikels de Jerusalem et de Viage de Godfray de Boylion*. For reasons that are unclear, possibly owing to poor administration rather than anything untoward, the book had not been restored to the countess after her nephew's death, and she was finally forced to petition the Council for its belated return two years later.[11]

Despite his fixation on the crown of France, Henry requested to be buried in England and his casket, topped with a life-sized wooden effigy, was solemnly carried north-west from Vincennes to Rouen before heading on to Calais. Exeter accompanied the sombre procession for much of the way, sorrowfully riding through northern France alongside Bedford, the captive King James I of Scotland, and Philip, duke of Burgundy. By the start of November, the king's body was back in London where Henry was laid to rest with great ceremony in Westminster Abbey. Those present would have noted the irony that, only a few weeks earlier on 21 October, Henry's fifty-three-year-old father-in-law Charles VI had also passed away. If the English king's disease-ravaged body could only have held on a few months longer, even in an incapacitated and bedridden state, he would have achieved his objective of becoming king of both England and France. Instead, both crowns now passed to his son, who at nine months old remained blissfully unaware of his exalted status.

The death of Henry V left the political scene of both kingdoms in

disarray, despite concerted attempts by the king to leave thorough instructions from his deathbed for their future governance. Given their extensive experience and reliability over the previous two decades, it is unsurprising to discover the Beauforts were among the select group chosen to oversee the early years of their great-nephew, now King Henry VI. Bedford was appointed regent of France and governor of Normandy while his brother Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, was tasked with overseeing England and responsible for the guardianship of the king. Much to Gloucester's frustration, however, he was to be subordinate to his elder brother Bedford when the latter returned to English soil.

The day-to-day responsibility for governance of the king's person and upbringing fell to Thomas Beaufort, with the duke assisted by two of Henry V's closest servants, Sir Walter Hungerford and Henry, Lord Fitzhugh, while the child's education was to be overseen by Bishop Beaufort and Richard Beauchamp, 13th Earl of Warwick, two learned individuals more than capable of providing the young king with a well-rounded religious and martial education steeped in morality and chivalry. Tellingly, all were men who had formed a core part of Henry's inner circle throughout his reign. It was evident he had handed over his son to those he trusted the most. Queen Katherine, a widow at only twenty years old, was to have no input whatsoever in how her son was to be raised.[12]

What does this appointment reveal about Exeter, personally charged with taking care of the new king? There is little doubt that Henry V had known his uncle well; they were only around nine years apart in age and had been close, figuratively and literally, throughout much of their lives. The Beauforts had always been a fixture around the Lancastrian household and from his earliest memories, Henry must have been aware of his grandfather's other family. It's likely that as early as 1403 Thomas Beaufort and Henry, then the teenaged Prince of Wales, had fought side by side during the Battle of Shrewsbury, an exhilarating if brutal victory for two young men finding their way in the world. The pair had then turned their attentions to matters of governance, serving alongside one another on the Council where they

developed a steady alliance in political matters. Their continued proximity during the French campaigns from 1415 onwards further suggests an amicable relationship that had been built on years of trust, loyalty and brotherhood.

Exeter had never let his nephew down, and was rewarded with a dukedom for his assiduous service. Despite his master's death, the duke was now expected to continue in such vein, entrusted with overseeing the childhood of the king's sole heir. It seems obvious that Exeter possessed certain characteristics that appealed to the king when the latter considered which of his nobles most closely matched his own idea of how his fatherless son should be raised. The conscientious duke was moral, devout and courageous, every inch an upstanding product of the House of Lancaster and it was clearly anticipated he would serve as an ideal father figure to the young king.

As one of four leading executors of the king's will, not to mention a man of industrious administrative talents, Bishop Beaufort was assigned the unenviable task of settling his nephew's financial affairs, a burden which took the churchman almost twenty years to complete. The bishop was also expected to construct a chantry chapel in Westminster Abbey to surround the planned tomb of the king, with instructions for it to be built to the east of St Edward the Confessor's chapel and to be constructed using stone from Caen in Normandy. Although the tomb was completed in 1431, the chantry was not begun until 1438, perhaps owing to the enduring financial difficulties of the royal exchequer. It was finally completed in 1450, a few years after the death of the bishop, and belatedly provided a lasting monument to the great victor of Agincourt.

The Beauforts had been forced to adapt once before after the death of a king; in that instance, the accession of their nephew as Henry V in 1413, Henry and Thomas Beaufort had already cultivated a close relationship with the new monarch in the preceding years and were able to use that to their own advantage thereafter. They secured patronage, titles and wealth through services recognised and rewarded. The situation that now faced them in late 1422 was

altogether different.

The new king was less than a year old, and had his own uncles, Bedford and Gloucester, jostling for power ahead of the Beauforts. A personal relationship with a baby was out of the question, therefore the brothers needed to politic on their own terms if they wanted to retain their prominent status as two of England's most powerful men. Aged around forty-seven and forty-five respectively, Henry and Thomas Beaufort were among the most experienced Englishmen in the realm, and while old friends increasingly fell by the wayside, the Beauforts had no plans to be consigned to the past just yet.

The Great Discord
1422–1426

Although child kings in medieval England were not an unknown occurrence, earlier instances when a minor had acceded to the English throne often precipitated a period of political and social unrest. Henry III, Edward III and Richard II all inherited the crown while underage and faced various issues early in their reigns. The minority of Henry VI was to be no different.

The royal child was only nine months old when he became king, and England faced two decades of conciliar governance, ample time for various counsellors to compete for authority in the power vacuum created by the absence of an adult king. It was a vacuum in which the Beauforts were determined to impose themselves, having been instrumental in English politics since the start of the century. It was a stance that would lead Henry Beaufort, in particular, into direct conflict with his proud nephew Humphrey, duke of Gloucester.

The first parliament of the third Lancastrian king's reign opened only two days after his father's funeral, and tension between the bishop and Gloucester soon became apparent. The ambitious duke believed he had been entrusted with the overall governance of England while his brother Bedford oversaw the Lancastrian interest in France, and therefore Gloucester, scholarly but less tactful than his siblings, anticipated ruling as regent of England with little interference. He did not account for the vociferous opposition of parliament, however, which had no intention of allowing Humphrey to assume control without its involvement.

Disregarding Henry V's dying wishes, arguing a dead king could not determine governance of the realm after his death, the parliament boldly determined that the position of Protector or Principal Councillor was appropriate for Gloucester, but not regent. It was a

position supported by Bedford, who wrote from France to reassert his claim to pre-eminence in England as next in line to the throne. Gloucester had little choice but to comply, and on 5 December was duly appointed 'Protector and Defender of the Kingdom of England and the English Church, and Principal Councillor of the lord king'. In other words, everything but regent.[1]

Opposition to Gloucester had been led by Thomas Beaufort, duke of Exeter; Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick; Edmund Mortimer, earl of March; and, particularly, Henry Beaufort, bishop of Winchester. The bishop, who still wielded significant influence among his parliamentary peers, had been excluded from authority in the final years of the previous reign and forced into taking a back seat as punishment for the furore surrounding his aborted appointment as cardinal. He had no intention of remaining in the shadows under the new king. The death of Henry V presented the bishop with an opportunity to return to his former prominence, an opening he was determined to seize. His return, however, was dependent on preventing his nephew Gloucester's own attempt to snatch power from the grasp of others. In a conciliar environment, Bishop Beaufort would be one among equals, able to safeguard his position while allowing his voice to be heard.

This should not be seen solely as a selfish act. Henry probably reasoned that, in its time of need, the country needed his vast experience to guide it through his great-nephew's minority. Was there another man in the kingdom better suited to such a role than the wise and learned bishop? Henry may also have determined that his nephew's temperament made him unsuitable for the role of regent, and it was in the national interest to prevent too much power being vested in the duke's person. His opposition to Humphrey, at this juncture at least, was strictly political, rather than personal. The Beauforts' long-term prospects, as ever, were closely entwined with the continued survival and prosperity of the House of Lancaster, and any decision made was generally in the interests of their royal kin.

The first council of Henry VI's reign was named on 9 December

1422, and as well as the slighted Gloucester, featured both Beauforts along with the earls of March, Warwick, Norfolk, Northumberland and Westmorland. It may not have been Beaufort-dominated, but the brothers certainly had strong connections with several of their fellow counsellors. Westmorland was their brother-in-law, and in turn the father-in-law of both Norfolk and Northumberland. Other counsellors such as Sir Walter Hungerford and Sir Walter Beauchamp were known associates of the bishop, while young Ralph, Lord Cromwell, had served in France in the retinue of the duke of Clarence and was known to Exeter.[2] In early 1424, the Beauforts' cousin Thomas Chaucer was also added to the Council, further strengthening their position.

Much of the first year of the young king's reign was spent consolidating the English position in France while maintaining the peace in England and Wales. On 14 February 1423, Exeter was named Justice of North Wales while two days later he was given, with his brother, custody of the Prior and Convent of Carmarthen, considered to have been 'greatly wasted by misrule'.[3] Then, on 6 March, he was given a payment of £600 owed to him from the French campaign of 1415.[4]

Exeter wouldn't have the opportunity to spend much, if any, time in Wales, for in mid-July he departed England once more for France, accompanied by his nephew by marriage John Mowbray, earl of Norfolk, and Lords Willoughby and Hungerford. In January 1423, the French had recaptured Meulan, and Bedford was keen to prevent any further losses to the former dauphin, now styled Charles VII by his supporters after the death of his father. Exeter's force included 380 men-at-arms and 1,140 archers, but little else is known about his part in the expedition, other than that his proposed sailing of May was delayed by a bout of illness.[5] Exeter, in fact, disappears from the records for over eighteen months.

During his brother's absence, Bishop Beaufort remained preoccupied with solidifying the family's position at court, a task he largely accomplished by using his significant wealth. The rich churchman was still owed substantial amounts of money he had lent

to Henry V, and while steps were taken by the Council to try to reduce his debt on the one hand, on the other Henry continued to lend money to fund Bedford's ongoing campaign. One noteworthy loan was the advancement of 14,000 marks on 1 March 1424. As security, he was to benefit from all subsidies raised from the shipping of wool, hides, woolfells, tin and tuns of wine from the ports of London, Kingston Upon Hull and Ipswich, up to the value of 8,000 marks. The remainder of the loan was to be paid to Henry directly from the Treasury, with 3,000 marks coming at Christmas and the other 3,000 the following summer. If the repayments were not honoured, then the bishop, who had been given several precious items from the crown jewels, was permitted to 'sell, alienate, or otherwise treat as his own' the royal regalia. Considering the jewels were worth more than the loan itself, it was a potentially lucrative transaction by the wily bishop, although his intention was only ever to use the jewels as leverage for power, rather than profit.[6]

The dynastic ambitions of the Beauforts were also evident during early 1424 when the bishop played a conspicuous part in the marriage of James I, King of Scotland. The king had been a prisoner of the English for seventeen of his thirty years, although he had been well treated by his hosts, even developing an amicable friendship with Henry V. After the latter's death, the Council discussed at length the issue of James's freedom, and a treaty was eventually signed in York on 10 September 1423 agreeing a seven-year truce between England and Scotland. Part of the agreement stipulated that James was to marry an English noblewoman, and the Beauforts had just the woman in mind: their niece Joan Beaufort.

The wedding of the Scottish king to the daughter of John Beaufort took place in Southwark Priory on 13 February 1424, and was officiated by the bride's proud uncle. The wedding feast took place at the churchman's nearby Palace of Winchester, with Bishop Beaufort triumphantly presiding over a lavish banquet to commemorate the union. The uniting of the House of Beaufort with Scottish royalty was clearly a significant moment for the family, demonstrating for the first time their standing outside England. No longer were the Beauforts

merely half-royals, connected to, but not part of, the English royal family. They were now royal assets in their own right.

Henry and Thomas Beaufort probably had great hopes for the prospects of the Beauforts as a result of the match, perhaps prompting them, along with the bride's mother Margaret Holland, to give the new couple 'a great abundance of plate and riche clothes of Arras', of which 'sorte of riches fewe or none before that daie wer ever seen in the countrey of Scotlande'. Their optimism was misplaced. Upon the king's return to Scotland, it became apparent James was not going to be a puppet of the English king, nor the Beauforts for that matter, and was soon in league with the rival French king, Charles VII. Tudor chronicler Edward Hall, writing a century later, harshly admonished the 'untrue prince' for taking after his 'false fraudulent forfathers' and becoming the very image of a 'braggyng and bostyng Scot'.[7] What Joan, absent from her family and in a strange and bitterly divided country, thought of the situation is unknown.

On 16 July 1424, Bishop Beaufort secured formal recognition of his return to the political forefront when, in the presence of his rival Gloucester, he was once more named chancellor, his third appointment to the office. He received the Great Seal from the outgoing chancellor, Thomas Langley, in the Great Chamber at Hertford Castle, and the bishop, emboldened by his appointment, quickly returned to his base in Southwark to commence his latest reign as Chancellor of England.[8] The appointment, if anything, was an acknowledgment that Henry and his money were indispensable to the governance of the realm and there were few men better qualified to steer policy while Bedford remained in France.

The relationship between Gloucester and Henry Beaufort further deteriorated in late 1424 when the duke unveiled his plans to invade Hainault, directly defying the chancellor, the Council and his brother Bedford. Humphrey, 'either blynded with ambicion or dotyng for love',[9] had scandalously married Jacqueline of Hainault in early 1423, overlooking the fact she was already wed to John IV, duke of Brabant. After the death of her father, Jacqueline was, by right, countess of

Hainault, Holland and Zeeland, although her uncle John III, duke of Bavaria, openly opposed her claim, initiating a bitter war of succession in the Low Countries. After the countess's husband Brabant entered an alliance with her uncle, Jacqueline was forced into exile in 1421 and sought refuge in England. She now resolved to cross the Channel to reclaim her territories, bolstered by an army led by her disputed husband Humphrey. Just like his grandfather John of Gaunt before him, the impetuous duke saw an opportunity to gain a foreign title and, against all advice, sought to claim it.

From the Council's point of view, this was a disastrous development. Bedford was struggling to maintain the English position in France and relied heavily on the alliance with his brother-in-law Philip, duke of Burgundy. Both men agreed an invasion of Hainault was detrimental to their continued friendship, but Gloucester stubbornly refused to obey Bedford's request to stand down. When the invasion became an inevitability, Burgundy informed Bedford he was compelled to support his cousin Brabant in the matter, jeopardising the English-Burgundian alliance. Bedford 'was much angered against his brother at heart, for his obstinacy',[10] and one imagines Bishop Beaufort and the Council were too. Despite such vociferous opposition, Gloucester departed England in the winter of 1424, leaving Henry Beaufort effectively in charge of the kingdom in the process.

With the dukes of Bedford, Gloucester and Exeter out of the country the bishop of Winchester endured a hectic winter in England, and because of his increased workload and expenditure he was granted an additional salary of 2,000 marks for his role as chancellor on 23 February 1425.[11] By April, however, Gloucester was back, and conflict between uncle and nephew was inevitable.

Humphrey's campaign had faltered after a promising start, having captured Mons in December, but his inability to secure the full submission of the region led him to gradually retreat, his actions having severely damaged England's lucrative sea trade with Flanders and pushing Burgundy towards reconciliation with Charles VII.

Further enraging Beaufort and Bedford was the fact that the irresponsible duke had left his wife behind in Hainault to continue her cause alone, choosing to return to England with a new mistress in tow named Eleanor Cobham, a lady-in-waiting to his wife.

Gloucester's expedition had been greatly supported by the commons of London, who praised the duke for attacking the hated Flemish. By contrast, Bishop Beaufort was vilified by the same commons who believed he was attempting to unjustly stifle Humphrey's cause. This loathing of the bishop worryingly manifested itself on 13 February 1425 when several anti-Flemish bills were posted throughout the city, including some 'set in the bishop's gate of Winchester'. As worried foreigners fled the city in panic, Henry took the wise decision to bolster his personal bodyguard before ordering Sir Richard Wydeville to take an armed force and guard the Tower of London, admitting no one without the authority of both bishop and Council.[12] He was preparing for the worst.

In mid-April, Gloucester marched through London until reaching the gates of the Tower, expecting his men to be let through. When Wydeville stood firm, having received no permission from the Council to allow the Protector entry, Gloucester became incensed and cursed the name of Henry Beaufort. Tensions remained high when parliament convened on 30 April, with Gloucester and Thomas Beaufort charged with carrying the three-year-old king into Westminster Hall, reminding all present who it was they served. The discord between the duke and chancellor could not be quashed, however, particularly once the angry bishop publicly chastised Gloucester for his infuriating behaviour. Humphrey's expedition across the Channel had cost England substantial trade with the Flemish, its relationship with the duke of Burgundy, and above all had jeopardised the English position in France. The bishop clearly resented Gloucester's sudden return to London, having to again defer to his nephew's senior rank. By the winter of 1425, the political rivalry between uncle and nephew had turned deeply personal.

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Thomas Beaufort had also returned to England prior to the end of April 1425, when he was present for the opening of parliament in Westminster.[13] The duke of Exeter had been serving in France for more than eighteen months, although there is no evidence he was present on the battlefield for Bedford's great victory over a Franco-Scottish force at Verneuil on 17 August 1424. Considering his initial deployment to France had been delayed by ill health, this may explain Exeter's absence from records during this period. Perhaps he was simply too unwell to have attended any meetings of note, and thus avoided the attentions of clerks and chroniclers alike.

Once back on English shores, and thrust back into the political scene, Exeter quickly benefitted from the recent death of the earl of March, when on 1 May 1425 he was granted a number of March's lands, spread across several counties including Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. It was anticipated Exeter would maintain the lands until March's heir, his teenaged nephew Richard, duke of York, came of age. On 29 July, the Beaufort duke again profited from the death of another, when he was temporarily given guardianship of all the temporalities of the bishopric of Norwich after the death of Bishop John Wakeryng, providing an additional income of £600 a year.[14]

Another significant bereavement occurred in October that year, when Ralph Neville, earl of Westmorland and husband of Joan Beaufort, passed away aged around sixty years old. Since his marriage into the Beaufort family in 1397, the earl had presided over the greatest dynasty in northern England, nurturing the loyalty of families such the Mowbrays and Percys through the marriages of his daughters and expanding the influence of his wife's brothers in the process. Having effectively disinherited his first family in favour of the children he had with his second wife, Westmorland had invested wisely in his Beaufort-Neville offspring, ensuring they were well placed in society and suitably primed to flourish in adulthood. His eldest son with Joan, Richard Neville, inherited many of the earl's palatial residences, including Raby, Middleham and Sheriff Hutton, although the earldom passed into the line of Ralph eldest son from his

first marriage as per the terms of its original grant. To compensate, Westmorland married Richard to Alice Montague, the sole heir of Thomas, 4th Earl of Salisbury, with the provision that upon Salisbury's death Richard would inherit the earldom by right of his wife, which is precisely what happened in 1428.

Westmorland's other Beaufort-Neville sons were also carefully provisioned for, taking full advantage of their royal blood; Robert was primed for a career in the Church, becoming bishop of Salisbury in 1427, while William was married to Lady Joan Fauconberg, claiming her father's baronage as his own in 1429. George Neville received the lands of his uncle John Neville, Baron Latimer, while Edward was knighted and would, in time, become Baron Bergavenny by right of his wife, just like some of his elder brothers.

The earl's daughters were not overlooked; Katherine and Eleanor had been married to the Mowbray and Percy heirs respectively, while Anne was wed to the Stafford heir Humphrey, later to become duke of Buckingham and one of the richest men in mid-fifteenth-century England. The youngest child of the Beaufort-Neville marriage, Cecily, was betrothed to her father's thirteen-year-old ward Richard of York, and it was this last union, above all, that later helped secure the Neville legacy.

Ralph Neville's death came at an inopportune time for Bishop Beaufort, who required powerful allies in his escalating quarrel with Gloucester. On 29 October, the rivalry intensified when Gloucester accused the chancellor of intending to seize the young king from Eltham Palace and to rule in his stead, possibly even intending to usurp the boy's place on the throne. It was a serious allegation and once the duke alerted the mayor and aldermen of London of his suspicion, an armed force was promptly raised on Gloucester's behalf. In response, the bishop, perhaps exhibiting behaviour more typical of a knight than a churchman, duly ordered his men, 'whiche were bothe knyghts and squyers, with a grete mayny of archerys'[15] to barricade the southern end of London Bridge. With soldiers on both sides of the crossing, panic spread throughout the city, with many closing their

shops and seeking shelter in fear of a pitched battle.

Henry Chichele, archbishop of Canterbury, eventually arrived on the scene and attempted to defuse the situation, riding between the two camps eight times before both duke and bishop agreed to stand their troops down. The prelate was accompanied by Prince Pedro of Portugal, a guest of the English court at the time, who as cousin to Gloucester and nephew of Beaufort was a suitable choice to intervene.

The issue was far from settled, however, and nor could it be after the bishop resorted to arms against Gloucester, who despite his questionable behaviour remained Protector of England and politically superior. It had been a direct challenge to the duke's authority, not that Henry exhibited any signs of regret. The following day, the enraged chancellor wrote to Gloucester's brother Bedford, pleading for the latter's intervention:

> Right high and mighty prince, and my right noble and after one, levest lord, I recommend me unto you with all my harte. And as you desire the welfare of the kyng our sovereign lord, and of his realms of England and France, and your awne health and ours also, so hast you hether. For by my trouth if you tary, we shall put this laude in adventure, with a felde, suche a brother you have here, God make hym a good man. For your wisedom knoweth, that the profite of France standeth in the welfare of England.
>
> Written in great hast on Allhallow even.
> By your true servant to my lifes ende.
> Henry Wynchester.[16]

The letter is extraordinary, and reveals much about the bishop's frame of mind. He was clearly on good terms with Bedford, and wisely appealed to the duke's desire for good governance in England and France, reminding the regent that without order in England, Lancastrian France would surely fall. Henry made no attempt to hide his disgust at Gloucester's behaviour, perhaps in the knowledge his recipient shared a similar opinion of the wayward duke. The bishop

noted he had written the letter in great haste, and his anger is palpable. He was pleading with Bedford to intervene before it was too late, and had clearly come to the end of his tether with Gloucester. Bedford appreciated the gravity of the situation, and on 20 December 1425 returned to England to personally terminate Gloucester's tumultuous tenure as Protector.

On 18 February 1426, parliament convened in Leicester and Bedford was determined to end the bitter animosity between his brother and uncle. He openly rebuked many of the lords present, brusquely reminding them they were still at war with Armagnac France and had no need of internal distractions. Such division did nobody any favours. Bedford appointed a commission to arbitrate the dispute between Gloucester and Henry which included the bishop's brother Exeter. Both men were given the opportunity to put forward their complaints.

Gloucester's grievances against the bishop were many, and included his anger that he had been blocked from the Tower and his concern that his uncle was plotting to seize the king before assuming control of the land. For good measure, Humphrey also accused Bishop Beaufort of attempting to assassinate the then Prince Henry in 1412, before attempting to persuade the same prince to usurp the throne of his father, Henry IV.

The bishop naturally denied the allegations. He claimed the Tower been justly barricaded because of the seditious bills which had been posted around London, an order which had the full support of the Council. He even counter-accused Gloucester of being 'right evil contented' when he arrived at the Tower, acting in the 'maner of a chast villain'. Henry also firmly declared that he 'never purposed to set hande on the kynges person, nor to remove him' from Eltham, and only barricaded London Bridge for his own 'suretie and defence'. For the sake of any doubt, he reiterated his previous allegiance to kings Henry IV and V, and fiercely rejected any insinuation that he plotted any assassination or usurpation. It was a determined and well-constructed response to Gloucester's damaging accusations.[17]

The commission's response was to force both men to put their names to a document pledging to maintain the peace in future, and to 'never hereafter take causes not quereles, displeasaunes nor hevynesse that one ayenst that othir'. The bishop, however, much to his frustration, was also made to issue a grovelling apology to his nephew:

> My Lorde of Gloucestre, I have conseyved to my grete hevynesse, that ye shulde have resseyved by dyvers reports that I shulde have purpose and ymagyned ayens youre persone honour and estate in dyvers maners, ffor the which ye have takyn ayens me grete displeasaune.
>
> Sire, I take God to my wytnesse that what reports so ever have be made unto yow oft me, paraventure by such as have nat hadde grete affeccion to me, God fforyeve yt hem, I never ymagyned ne purposed thing that myht be hynderyng or prejudice to your persone, honour or estate.[18]

He may have been acquitted of any significant wrongdoing, but the fact Henry had to apologise to Gloucester was humiliating. On 16 March 1426, he resigned the chancellorship, and although it is not clear if this was his decision or one enforced upon him as a further concession to Gloucester, the bishop's influence was consequently curtailed. He promptly retreated from court, only attending four council meetings in the next twelve months, and in a move that suggested he was dismayed by recent events, received licence from the council on 14 May to depart the country on pilgrimage.[19] For the second time in a decade, Henry Beaufort was out in the cold.

His brother Thomas, meanwhile, had kept a relatively low profile during the parliamentary proceedings, his presence on the commission to arbitrate between the bishop and the duke notwithstanding. He was also named part of another commission on 26 May, alongside Gloucester, to redress infractions in the Scottish truce; on 16 July he received an annuity of 300 marks for his role on the council, although what precisely prompted this grant is unclear.[20] Only ten days later,

however, the duke was removed from his long-standing role as admiral of England, Ireland and Aquitaine, and replaced by Bedford. No reason was given for this sudden change, but it seems likely that Exeter, approaching his fiftieth year, had fallen ill once more and was unable to fulfil his duties.

By December there was no doubt that Thomas's health was in sharp decline, and just after Christmas the duke of Exeter, the 'wise and wel learned counsailer' to three successive Lancastrian kings, passed away at his manor of East Greenwich.[21] It was another bitter blow for the family, coming soon after Henry Beaufort's downfall and the death of Joan's husband Ralph Neville. Exeter had proved himself one of the finest knights of the Hundred Years War, serving with distinction on both land and sea. Although he hadn't been present at Agincourt in 1415, it was he, above all others, who secured the English position in France shortly after Henry V's famous victory, valiantly holding Harfleur and Rouen before serving as Captain of Paris and Governor of Charles VI. Considered to be King Henry's 'uncle dere and trewe' by the rhyming chronicler John Hardyng, Exeter had unquestionably been a man full of 'worthyhode'.[22]

He was brave in war, pious by nature, and loyal to his core. Above all, he was generous to those less fortunate. The chronicler William Worcester wrote of Exeter in his *Itineraries*:

> Every day he had 13 poor people and each of them was served with a first course and a second course of food with two loaves of bread, one of white and one of Chete-lof and each of them had three pence a day…He himself paid the cooks' fee and ordered 26 gallons of pottage for the poor to eat, sometimes 300, 200 or 100 of them each day he fed, and everyday with wine.[23]

The duke went even further; on the eve of St Mary, each poor almswoman was given a set of bedclothes, a mattress, a pair of blankets and a pillow, while every woman lying in childbirth was provided with food and wine every day. On Maundy Thursday, Exeter

always washed the feet of the poor, giving to each person a robe and as many pence as their years, sometimes even giving his cloak, doublet, belt and money purse. He did not abide swearers or liars in his company, and if anyone he had served with in France had fallen on hard times he would provide food, fuel and candles.

A funeral service was held in St Paul's in January, and although it was attended by the leading members of the court, his brother Henry was probably absent due to being abroad. Perhaps because of lengthy spells away from home while in the service of kings, the duke had no surviving children with his wife Margaret Neville, who had predeceased Thomas by more than a decade, their only son, Henry, having died in infancy. The chief Beaufort mourner at his funeral, in absence of his brother and the lack of wife, was probably the only male-line nephew still at liberty, Edmund Beaufort. It seems likely, however, that his many Neville kin were present, with his surviving Swynford and Chaucer relations.

With 'al funeral pompe', the cortège carrying Exeter's body was transported through the streets of London to the Benedictine abbey of Bury St Edmunds, where he was interred next to his wife in St Mary's Chapel.[24] Some modern accounts claim the duke's burial took place at Mount Grace Priory in North Yorkshire, and although the Exeter did provide several endowments to the monastery, including providing for five chaplains to pray for his soul after death in June 1415,[25] his will made it clear where he wished to be interred:

> My body to be buried with Margaret, my wife, in the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin annexed to the Church of St Edmund's Bury, in the Diocese of Norwich.

The remainder of the will provides vivid insight into Thomas's charitable and devout character. Transcribed on 29 December, Exeter's last testament humbly requested that 'one thousand masses be said for my soul', with prayers also said for the souls of his parents, John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford. Curiously, the duke did ask that 'no sumptuous or extraordinary expense be made at my funeral',

although he did wish for five candles and five torches to be placed around his body every morning and evening prior to his burial. Continuing his penchant for helping the needy even in death, Exeter also requested fifty poor men dressed in white cloth gowns and hoods to carry torches during his funeral, for which each would 'receive as many pence as I have lived'. Another fifty poor women 'of good character' were also to be procured as morners.

The duke bequeathed 4,000 marks to the monastery in which he was to be buried, with several payments also made to specific ecclesiastical figures who had been of service to Exeter during his lifetime, including the Westminster monk John Loudon and two nuns named Johanna of Temple Bar and Alice of St Albans. He also ensured money was left for the London hospitals of St Mary, St Bartholomew, St Giles and St Thomas, while providing £100 to be distributed among the inmates of Ludgate, Newgate, Fleet, Marshalsea and King's Bench prisons upon their freedom, albeit at the discretion of his executors.

Family featured prominently in Exeter's will, although curiously there is no mention of his brother Henry. Presuming he wasn't named as an executor or supervisor because he was out of the country at the time, was the bishop excluded from the will because of his already vast wealth, or was there an underlying issue between the pair of which there is no extant evidence? Thomas did leave his sister Joan a book named *Tristram,* while his half-brother Thomas Swynford received a silver cup. Another Thomas Swynford, presumably Exeter's nephew, was given fifty marks, while sixty other members of his retinue were mentioned by name and received payments of varying degrees. Other notable beneficiaries of the will included John de Vere, the earl of Oxford, who received a silver vessel; Ignasio Clifton, who was left a suit of armour and two horses; and Thomas Hoo, who was bequeathed another horse, named Dunne. The duke's treasurer William Morley was given all of Exeter's tenements in Norwich while Richard Carbonell was left a velvet doublet.[26] After the sale of his remaining manors, jewels and silver plate, as well as the repayment of any loans outstanding, the duke's estate amounted to a reasonable £6,787.[27]

Although Exeter did not want much to be spent on his funeral, he did leave instructions for a tomb to be erected over his grave, for which £100 was bequeathed. If this tomb was created, then no trace survives; it is likely to have been destroyed during the aftermath of the monastery's dissolution in 1539. Exeter's grave was apparently rediscovered on 7 February 1772 when several labourers uncovered a heavy oak-covered coffin that contained a cloth-covered body, considered to be perfectly preserved. A local surgeon claimed the body was sturdy, about six feet tall with greying brown hair.[28] The remains were eventually reinterred near where the body had been found, albeit minus a hand that had been kept by the Royal College of Surgeons, the fate of which is unknown.[29]

Thomas Beaufort had been a remarkable man, and lived an extraordinary life. He played an integral part in establishing the Lancastrian dynasty upon the English throne and survived to witness his great-nephew become, in theory, king of France. A scholar, soldier and statesman, Thomas was one of the last great knights of the Late Middle Ages, and his loss was not only keenly felt by the remaining Beauforts, but also by his fellow Englishmen.

Great and Grievous Adversity
1427–1431

The demise of Thomas Beaufort had come at an inopportune moment for Henry Beaufort, who must have cursed the loss of his brother's presence just when he most needed the duke's invaluable support, both publicly and privately. Disregarding any personal grief, Exeter's death was a political catastrophe for the bishop, depriving him of a widely respected ally in his escalating conflict with the duke of Gloucester. Henry faced an uncertain future in England, and for the first time in a generation there was no Beaufort involved in the upper echelons of English governance. The bishop of Winchester had gambled in his dispute with Humphrey of Gloucester, and, humiliatingly, had lost.

There was still opportunity for Henry to impose himself on the continental stage, however. The duke of Bedford was keen to remain on cordial terms with his dismayed uncle and sought to placate the former chancellor with a prize once denied the proud churchman: the cardinal's hat. Bedford was committed to his brother Henry V's objective of conquering France, and knew he could expect steadfast support from his uncle across the Channel, both politically and financially. It was a prudent move on the duke's behalf, and prevented further alienation.

The pair departed England together in March 1427, sailing from Dover at the head of a grand force assembled to provide renewed impetus to Bedford's flagging campaign. The first port of call was Calais, where Henry was formally inducted into the cardinalate under the watchful gaze of his approving nephew Bedford and his duchess. The solemn ceremony took place in the town's St Mary's Church, a heavily fortified, fourteenth-century structure fittingly constructed by English hands early during their occupation. The cardinal's hat had

been brought from Rome by Pope Martin V's own cousin who, upon his arrival, set it upon the high altar with 'grete reverence'. Henry, dressed in a fine scarlet cope furred with pured (the expensive belly fur of the grey squirrel), conducted Mass before kneeling in front of the altar while the Papal Bull confirming his elevation was read aloud. In a conscious display of personal affection and political affiliation, Bedford stepped forward once the bull had been proclaimed and removed the cardinal's hat from the altar before gently placing it atop his uncle's head.[1]

Henry may have been forced to relinquish the chancellorship the previous year, and with it any vestige of political power in England, but as Cardinal-Priest of St Eusebius he now claimed religious supremacy over any other man, save for the Holy Father and his fellow cardinals. Furthermore, English cardinals were not a common occurrence, with Adam Easton in 1381 the last fully recognised Englishman afforded the honour. The rarity of the elevation undoubtedly appealed to the proud recipient, who had already grasped at such a prize eight years earlier only to have it frustratingly withdrawn at the last moment.

Accompanying Bedford and the new cardinal across the Channel was young Edmund Beaufort, cousin of the former and nephew of the latter. Edmund was around twenty-one years old, but since the death of his uncle Exeter represented the hopes of the secular Beaufort line. His two elder brothers, John and Thomas, remained imprisoned in France, the dates of their release uncertain and complicated by political considerations on both sides. The English had shown little willingness to release their own hostages, and therefore could hardly expect to be treated favourably in return. Hostages could be a profitable business, therefore the money had to be right, and so too the timing. Neither had been satisfactory thus far.

As 2nd Earl of Somerset, John Beaufort was the highest-ranking English peer in French possession, the son of a respected commander and with royal blood in his veins. He had initially been the prisoner of a lowly Scottish esquire named Lawrence Vernon, before his rights

were purchased by Charles VII in 1423, for which the Scotsman was well compensated, receiving a substantial cash payment in addition to the lordship of Montreuil-Bonin, which his descendants held for the next century.[2]

Charles swiftly transferred the young earl into the custody of Marie, wife of John, duke of Bourbon, who was himself a prisoner having been captured at Agincourt in 1415. It was clearly anticipated the duchess, also mother of another prisoner Charles, count of Eu, would use Somerset to try and negotiate her husband's release, with one concerted attempt made by both parties in 1427. On 27 March, Bourbon initiated a petition requesting the liberation of John and Thomas Beaufort, while in the November parliament, the brothers reciprocated the gesture by petitioning Gloucester and the Council to release the French duke.[3]. Neither appeal was successful, probably because of Henry V's instructions before his death prohibiting the release of French prisoners until his son reached adulthood. This directive left the Beaufort siblings facing at least another decade of captivity before any prospective release, a situation which must have frustrated Somerset in particular, as he had formally come into full possession of his father's lands on 24 September 1425 after his age was proved before the Council.[4] A further order on 6 June 1427 also granted the earl several lands that had formerly belonged to his uncle Exeter, a solid recognition of his status as the senior Beaufort heir.[5] Somerset therefore had a significant estate awaiting him on release, but until that day arrived, it remained in the custody of his mother Margaret Holland.

Edmund Beaufort's participation in Bedford's latest campaign could not have pleased Margaret when one considers how her family had already been decimated by the French wars. In the event that anything happened to either of the duchess's captive sons, then the entire future of the Beaufort dynasty rested solely on the shoulders of Edmund. His capture, or worse, was unthinkable. Even so, Edmund had no significant inheritance to rely on and, like scores of Englishmen before him, including his father John and uncle Thomas, it was service in France that provided an opportunity to procure land,

titles and honour for men of ambition.

There may, of course, have been another pressing reason behind Edmund's departure to France in 1427, and that was his alleged closeness to the king's mother, Queen Katherine. Rumours of an affair between the young widow and the budding soldier alarmed Gloucester, nervous of the possibility a Beaufort stepfather could exert unchecked influence over the impressionable king. Katherine was still just twenty-six years old at the time of Edmund's departure, and remained capable of bearing children, as proven by her later offspring. Any prospective match between the king's mother and Cardinal Beaufort's nephew was politically catastrophic for Gloucester, and his response was to oversee the passing of a parliamentary Act forbidding Katherine from marrying without the explicit permission of the king.

The Act, ratified in the parliament that sat between October 1427 and March 1428, stipulated 'no man should contract with, or marry himself to any queen of England, without the special licence or assent of the king', adding that anyone who flouted the law did so 'on pain to lose all his goods and lands'.[6] Since the king was only six years old, Katherine had effectively been barred from marriage for another decade, supposedly scuppering any intention Edmund had of making the dowager queen his wife. In any event, Katherine paid no heed to the repressive statute, for she soon married a Welshman named Owen Tudor, and together the pair had four children before her death in 1437 exposed the union.

It is interesting to note the eldest child of the Tudor-Valois marriage, probably born sometime between 1428 and 1430, was christened Edmund, prompting recent speculation the father was not in fact Owen Tudor, but rather Edmund Beaufort. This is highly speculative; there is no satisfactory evidence Edmund and Katherine engaged in a physical affair other than rumour, and although the first Tudor child was indeed christened Edmund, there could be various explanations for this – perhaps Edmund Beaufort stood godfather to the boy, or maybe the name was inspired by St Edmund the Martyr, particularly if the birth had taken place on the saint's feast day of 20

November. It should also be noted the child's birthplace of Much Hadham in Hertfordshire was less than fifty miles away from Bury St Edmunds, where the shrine of St Edmund was located.

The typically English name for a child of Welsh and French parentage *is* curious, but should not necessarily cast doubt on his parentage. For the remainder of his life, and even that of his descendants, Edmund Tudor was openly acknowledged to be the son of Owen Tudor,[7] and Gloucester never accused nor challenged Edmund Beaufort over the issue, who for his part also never claimed paternity of the child. Most tellingly, when Richard III challenged the legitimacy of Henry Tudor's ancestry in 1485, there was no mention of Katherine's marriage with Owen, nor the possibility that Edmund Tudor was, in fact, a Beaufort bastard. With all parties therefore outwardly accepting Edmund as the son of Owen Tudor, it seems the subject needs no further debate.

Plans for Edmund Beaufort to join his uncle Henry and cousin Bedford in France were well underway by February 1427 when a commission was handed to Ralph Cromwell, John Tipton and William Breton to inspect Beaufort's retinue on 3 March at Barham Downs, a hill halfway between Canterbury and Dover.[8] Edmund crossed to Calais later in the month, arriving in Paris in April, where Bedford personally bestowed upon him the French title count of Mortain.[9]

Throughout the summer Edmund served in his cousin's army, observing the more experienced soldiers at close quarters and developing knowledge of warfare and leadership. Edmund's ancestry carried with it an expectation he would, in time, become one of England's foremost military captains, and the campaign of 1427 was intended to be an educational introduction. The only way to truly prepare for the hardship of medieval war was to endure medieval war, although any schooling was brief, for by winter Edmund was back in England. His reappearance in London, just over six months after his departure, suggests he had not been permanently exiled because of any relations with Queen Katherine, and although it is unclear if Gloucester and the Council disapproved of his re-emergence in

England, there is no record they opposed it either.

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Cardinal Beaufort spent much of 1427 adjusting to his new role on the Continent, throwing himself wholeheartedly into furthering the English cause in France while endeavouring to satisfy the increasing demands of an expectant Pope Martin. Shortly after receiving his cardinal's hat in Calais, Henry had departed to Lille for a peace summit with the duke of Burgundy, and again succeeded in consolidating the unstable Anglo-Burgundian alliance. His next assignment, however, was to take him further afield.

The pope had grown exasperated with the continuing Hussite movement in Bohemia, and in 1426 announced a fourth Crusade within six years to deal once and for all with the tenacious followers of the reformist priest Jan Hus. Hus had campaigned vigorously for change in the Catholic Church, protesting in particular against indulgences, before he was captured and burned to death for heresy in 1415. Hus's supporters persevered with the priest's message after his death, vehemently condemning the papacy and slaughtering Catholics who stood in their way, becoming a palpable threat to the supremacy of papal authority in Central Europe. The pope scoured the Continent for a leader of both religious and military bearing, capable of defending the Church spiritually and physically. Henry Beaufort proved to be the obvious candidate.

After his elevation to the cardinalate was announced, Henry was reminded by the pope he was expected to 'shed his blood for the church', and accordingly, on 17 April 1427 was appointed Papal Legate in Bohemia, Germany and Hungary. In effect, he was expected to lead the crusade and tasked with uniting the many autonomous city-states of the Holy Roman Empire into one cohesive force capable of defeating the Hussite threat. The cardinal was singled out for the mission because of his 'wisdom and prudence', that with his royal lineage and diplomatic experience would, it was hoped, render him much 'feared in war'.[10] Astutely, the pope had appealed to Henry's

considerable ego, and the ambitious Englishman eagerly thrust himself into the unexpected challenge.

Unfortunately for Cardinal Beaufort, the crusade proved to be a poisoned chalice. The mercenary troops were not dedicated to the cause, were disorganised, demotivated, and ultimately no match for the patriotic and religious fervour of their adversary. Henry's only military engagement with the Hussites occurred on 4 August 1427 near Tachov, a Bohemian border town roughly halfway between Nuremberg and Prague. In a desperate attempt to rally his hesitant soldiers, the cardinal unfurled a papal banner and assumed position at the head of his army while doggedly clutching a crucifix, imploring them to defend the Holy Church at all costs. His efforts were to no avail. The crusaders were routed by the Hussites, and the fifty-two-year-old churchman was forced to flee rather than risk being slaughtered, loudly cursing his lack of English archers.[11]

Henry was determined to avenge the humiliating loss, and once on safe ground admonished the various German princes and burgesses for their lack of courage, unity and discipline on the battlefield. In October, the disappointed pope wrote to the cardinal having heard of the army's 'disgraceful flight', but nonetheless commended Henry for his efforts thus far, pleading with him to persevere with the campaign.[12] The loss had clearly not tarnished Henry's reputation in Rome. With the full weight of the Church behind him, the cardinal summoned a parliament in Frankfurt on 16 November, and was at his imperious best in persuading the assembled princes and bishops to levy a tax in their dominions to fund another army, the command of which would be personally overseen by himself and Frederick I, Margrave and Elector of Brandenburg. It was a promising start, but once the various parties returned to their states, the pledged riches were not forthcoming.

By February 1428, Henry lost patience with the Germans and composed a letter to the archbishop of Salzburg declaring his intention to absent himself 'for some time from these parts of Germany' to return to England, where he hoped to preach the crusade

and recruit more reliable, battle-hardened soldiers than could be found in Europe. By 9 March, the cardinal was in Bruges, from where he wrote another letter, this time to his 'most Christian king' Henry VI, stressing how 'expedient and nedful it is these dayes' to prevent those that aim to 'subverte the cristien and catholike faith'.[13] It was addressed to the king, but the contents were for the Council's notice. Henry was telling them that he was coming home.

After spending the summer in the Low Countries and Calais, on 1 September, Henry and his retinue arrived at Blackheath, to the south of London, where he awaited his formal welcome back to the city. That welcome was decidedly lukewarm, at best. The cardinal was greeted by the mayor of London and his alderman, several local friars and his two nephews, Edmund Beaufort and Robert Neville, the latter of whom was son of Joan Beaufort. Neville's career had followed a path similar to that of his uncle, having initially been educated at Oxford before his elevation to the bishopric of Salisbury while still in his early twenties. His rise owed much to the influence of the cardinal, who possibly saw a bit of himself in his sister's son. After the chapter of Salisbury had elected their dean, Simon Sydenham, to the bishop's throne, Henry intervened and appealed directly to Rome, prompting the pope, 'moved solely by the cardinal's prayer', to authorise Neville's appointment on account of his 'affection for the cardinal'.[14] Other than his nephews, however, there was no sign of any other lord of note at Blackheath, spiritual or temporal. The cardinal had been very publicly shunned.

Henry Beaufort was nonetheless determined to flaunt his authority to the people of London, and resplendent in his red velvet cope and hat, was led in procession 'with great reverence and worship' across London Bridge to St Paul's Cathedral, before continuing to Westminster.[15] A cross highlighting his papal legate status was borne ahead of the cardinal, while two knights carried his red hat alongside the cortege. It was a commanding display from the self-styled cardinal of England, and in the absence of the nobility, Henry had been able to monopolise the attentions of the impressionable Londoners. He spent a day recuperating from his travels at his bishop's palace in Southwark,

before departing from London to visit the king at Windsor Castle. From Windsor, the cardinal headed north-west, stopping at St Albans, where he made an offering at the shrine, before advancing to Sopwell, King's Langley, Walsingham and King's Lynn.[16]

By early November he had returned to London, and on 11 November he finally came face to face with the Council, including his long-standing nemesis Gloucester. The cardinal voiced his intention to travel throughout England preaching the Bohemian crusade, hoping to secure men and money for the holy cause. The Council responded they could not accept his status as papal legate, brusquely reminding the cardinal how the office had not been recognised in England since the reign of Richard II. They did, however, announce they were willing to provide a modest 250 men-at-arms and 2,000 archers for the crusade, with the provision they were paid for by Rome. It was half the men Henry requested in his original petition to the Council, but he had little alternative other than to accept the compromise.[17] It had been an inauspicious return to England, to say the least.

As part of the agreement, Henry was compelled to travel north to revive the Council's deteriorating relationship with James I of Scotland, who was proving obstinate about honouring the terms of his freedom. The Scottish king, the cardinal's nephew by marriage, had repeatedly failed to pay the ransom set for him on his release in 1424, and, more worryingly, had recently entered negotiations with Charles VII: James planned that his eldest daughter Margaret, a Beaufort by blood, would be married the French king's heir, Louis. This had disastrous implications for England, which faced the alarming prospect of losing the peace treaty with Scotland on one hand while observing the rival king of France receiving international recognition of his status on the other.

The cardinal formally received his commission on 10 February 1429, and met with James at Coldingham in the Scottish Borders. Henry was accompanied on the expedition by the northern bishops of Durham and Carlisle and Henry Percy, 2nd Earl of Northumberland and another nephew by marriage.[18] Beaufort proved to be at his

persuasive best during the negotiations, and the Scottish king pledged not to ally with the French, claiming he would uphold the conditions of his treaty with England in future. Henry had done what was required of him.

By the end of March 1429, Henry, presumably weary from his travels, was again back in London and hoped to finally focus on recruiting soldiers for the crusade. He was dealt an unforeseen blow on 17 April, however, when the Council, encouraged by the wishes of Gloucester, declared it intended to forbid the cardinal from fulfilling his traditional role in the annual St George's Day festivities. Despite his appointment to the cardinalate, Henry had retained his See of Winchester by special authority of the pope, and this not only afforded him the right to officiate at the ceremony in his capacity as bishop, but also to a seat on the Council. Henry's attempt to suddenly assert one of his traditional rights raised concerns it would encourage the cardinal to claim his place in government, which he had thus far not done. It was this possibility that probably prompted his exclusion from the ceremony. An enraged Henry remonstrated against the decision the following day, but was unable to overturn the Council's verdict.[19] It was yet another humbling episode for the cardinal, and a clear sign that while Gloucester remained the dominant political figure in England, Henry's position was vulnerable.

Ultimately, the cardinal's ambitious plans for crusade were doomed the moment a teenage French peasant named Jeanne arrived in Orléans to lift the English siege, an act that transformed the waning fortunes of Charles VII in his bitter war with Bedford. Known to history as Joan of Arc, the farmer's daughter from Domrémy claimed to be on a mission from God to aid Charles in expelling the English from France and reconquer the kingdom for the House of Valois. The king was in a desperate state, struggling to repel Bedford's advance, and with the prospect of losing Orléans in the near future he felt he had little to lose in providing Joan with a small force. It proved to be a momentous decision.

Joan arrived in Orléans on 29 April 1429 and her impact was

immediate, taking both the English and French by surprise. She galvanised the exhausted troops and roused the beleaguered citizens, pledging to 'make a war-cry that will be remembered forever'[20] if the English did not leave France at once. By 8 May, the bewildered English army was forced into retreat, bringing to an ignominious end to their six-month campaign, frustrated within a week by a mere teenage girl. The capture of Orléans had been crucial to Bedford's plan in expanding his operation into south-eastern Armagnac France, the last part of the kingdom that wasn't under English control. His failure to capture Orléans gave Charles renewed hope he could still recapture his father's crown, and represented a turning point in what proved to be the final phase of the Hundred Years War.

Joan, who referred to herself as *La Pucelle,* or the Maid, urged Charles to go on the offensive against the English and use the momentum gained from defending Orléans to clear the region of Bedford's men and regain control of the River Loire. It was an ambitious plan, unfathomable only a few weeks earlier, but the king consented to the wishes of his unrelenting commander. The result was four successive victories for the French within the space of a week, culminating in the Battle of Patay on 18 June. Little wonder the *Chronicles of London* referred to Joan of Arc as a 'false witche'.[21] The French naturally started to believe they truly had God on their side.

The Maid's impact was felt further afield than the Loire Valley. News filtered through to England of the French victories just as Cardinal Beaufort approached the final stages of preparation for his Bohemian crusade. On 15 June, the day Joan's army captured the bridge crossing at Meung-sur-Loire, three English sergeants-at-arms named John Hunte, John Talbot and John Clynk were ordered by the Council to procure ships for the cardinal's imminent crossing to the continent; the following day John Yerd and Stephen Lillebourne were commanded to arrange lodging for Henry and his retinue when they arrived in Kent. On 17 June, Edmund Beaufort was granted licence by the Council to join his uncle on the crusade, with the cardinal formally appointed 'captain of the English forces' the following morning. That same day, however, the English army, under the

command of Sir John Talbot, was routed at Patay, and once news of this latest capitulation reached England, the cardinal's expedition to Bohemia was postponed.[22]

It is not known what discussions took place between Henry and the Council in private, but publicly it was declared, due to the 'greet and grevous adversitees' taking place in France, English soldiers could not be spared for the Hussite crusade and were instead to be deployed to France to aid Bedford's floundering campaign. On 1 July, the Council announced 'the cardinal of England promises to serve in France with his retinue for six months before going to Bohemia', choosing to do so for the 'most singuler love, zeele and tendrenesse that he bereth to the seuretee, welfare and prosperitee of the king'.[23] He was to be remunerated well for his last-minute cooperation, receiving 1,000 marks as a reward.

It's likely Cardinal Beaufort had had every intention of travelling to central Europe on crusade before the Council intervened. He had no real political purpose in England after losing the chancellorship, and the furore over the St George's Day ceremony only highlighted his lack of influence on those involved in positions of authority. He had found a worthy cause on the continent and almost certainly intended to proceed with his mission rather than standing idly by in England. That being said, once faced with the choice between serving his king or his pope, there was only going to be one outcome for the cardinal. Henry could not serve two masters, and his loyalty to the House of Lancaster far outweighed any devotion he had to anybody else, including the papacy. His decision to cooperate with the Council's request to serve in France ahead of Bohemia ended any papal aspirations the cardinal held, and tarnished his relationship with Pope Martin.

On 16 July 1429, Edmund Beaufort again received permission from the Council to travel abroad with his uncle's retinue, albeit this time to France, and was almost certainly chosen at the behest of the cardinal, who was free to select his own commanders.[24] Edmund was rerred to in council records as 'Sir Edmund Beaufort of Southwark',

suggesting he was either residing with his uncle at Winchester Palace or had a house nearby. Both Beauforts, with their respective retinues, sailed for France at the end of July, shortly after news reached the English council that the French royal court, led by Joan of Arc, had boldly marched through English-controlled territory to Reims, where Charles VII was crowned king of France on 17 July.

In August and September, Pope Martin dispatched a series of letters to the cardinal and Charles, and his displeasure with the Englishman was palpable. Martin informed the French king of his surprise at discovering Henry had arrived in France at the head of an army originally raised by invoking the name of the Church, declaring such an action to be against his wishes. The pope assured Charles he had instructed the renegade cardinal to desist from using the insignia of a papal legate while in France, although Henry, for his part, responded to the pope that he was merely acting under orders of his own king, insisting his soldiers would only obey their monarch in the matter.[25] There is probably an element of truth to his protestations; the common Englishman was always more likely to want to face the French than fight elsewhere.

The crowning of Charles in Reims, the traditional site of French coronations for over six hundred years, was a bitter psychological blow to the English operation, and prompted Bedford to press ahead with plans for a counter-coronation. The first step was to crown Henry VI in England and, at the end of October 1429, the cardinal returned to London again to attend his great-nephew's coronation on 5 November. Although Beaufort was given the honour of conducting the Mass in Westminster Abbey, it was his old adversary Archbishop Chichele who assumed responsibility for the actual crowning, no doubt much to the proud cardinal's frustration. Henry did sit 'in a sete by the ryght hand of the Kyng' at the feast in the evening, but played no other obvious part in the celebrations.[26]

The coronation, and his readiness to support Bedford in France, did however represent the cardinal's formal return to the English political scene and on 18 December he was readmitted to the Council three and

a half years after he resigned the chancellorship. Although his appointment owed much to recent actions, his kinship to the king, lengthy record of fidelity to the crown and assiduous nature were also acknowledged, although it was noted Henry could not serve in council meetings that involved matters pertaining to the Holy See.[27] Two days later parliament granted the king a second subsidy of taxation, with the explicit preamble it did so on the 'special recommendation of the right-reverend father in Christ the lord Henry by divine permission cardinal-priest St Eusebius, commonly called the Cardinal of England'.[28]

This turnaround in relations was in stark contrast to Henry's unpopularity with both the Council and commons only a few years earlier. They may still have resented the cardinal's contentious status as papal legate, but it was clear his personal devotion to both England and the Lancastrian dynasty was begrudgingly respected.

Having crowned and anointed Henry VI king of England, the Council, with the cardinal firmly on board, set in motion Bedford's plan to take the young boy across the Channel to be crowned king of France. The immediate concern was to secure Normandy against the resurgent forces of Charles VII, and 5,000 extra soldiers were raised to bolster Bedford's struggling army. The cost of wages proved to be beyond the council's capability, and so several loans were procured, with the largest being the £8,333 lent by Cardinal Beaufort.[29]

Henry, who had proved his negotiation skills a year earlier with the king of Scotland, was also dispatched in February 1430 to ensure the continuing commitment of the duke of Burgundy. On the one hand, Duke Philip still bore a grudge against Charles VII for the assassination of his father in 1419, and was brother-in-law of Bedford through the latter's marriage to Anne of Burgundy; he also had economic matters in Flanders to consider, and the profitable advantages of friendship with England. On the other hand, the duke was forced to give serious thoughts to the overtures of peace he was receiving from Charles, particularly as it had become obvious the tide was turning against the English and Burgundian lands were

increasingly under threat from French forces.

Fortunately for the English, the cardinal was the most persuasive negotiator of his day and, relying on his long-standing relationship with Burgundy, convinced the wavering duke to remain aligned with England for the foreseeable future. Burgundy's choice ultimately depended on whether he wanted an Armagnac king, responsible for the death of his father, or a distant English king. The cost of the agreement with England was 12,500 marks, a sum the cardinal duly delivered to Philip in person, at Lille, in March. As this was the same amount Henry had earlier pledged to the king, he was, in effect, personally bankrolling the Burgundian alliance. If the cardinal's experience wasn't appreciated by Gloucester's Council, then his wealth certainly was.

His return to England was brief. On 16 April 1430, Henry negotiated terms with the Council to cross to France in preparation for the eight-year-old's coronation, for which the cardinal would receive £1,000. A week later, on St George's Day, the royal court, with the cream of English nobility, departed for Calais.[30] Their journey through Normandy was slow, with the safety of the young king paramount, and the royal party didn't arrive in Rouen until 29 July, when the child was startled by the rapturous welcome of the crowd. By the time the procession had reached the cathedral, the king was pleading with his elders for the noise to be stopped.[31]

Any concerns Cardinal Beaufort may have had about the general English position in France, or his great-nephew's behaviour, were assuaged by news that Joan of Arc, the scourge of Bedford for much of the previous year, had been unexpectedly captured by the Burgundians. It wouldn't have escaped the Council's attention that the Burgundian alliance had only endured because of the cardinal's diplomatic efforts in February.

A Burgundian army under the command of Jean de Luxembourg had attacked the town of Compiègne in early May, prompting the Maid to try to lift the siege before the town was sacked. Unlike at Orlèans the previous year, the scene of her initial success, Joan no

longer enjoyed the same level of military or political support from King Charles, who had recently adopted a more diplomatic approach to the conflict. The tenacious Maid differed in opinion, and on 24 May her small force attacked a Burgundian garrison near the town. Outnumbered and outmanoeuvred, Joan was 'dragged from her horse by an archer' and with little chance of escape, opted to surrender to the nearest knight she saw. Her capture caused the English to be 'rejoiced, and more pleased than if they had taken five hundred other combatants, for they dreaded no other leader or captain' as much as they feared Joan of Arc.[32] By November, she had been purchased from the Burgundians for 10,000 Francs, with the funds raised from a round of taxation in Normandy.

For the Beauforts, the Maid's apprehension provided significant relief. Her aggressive campaigning and religious bearing had struck terror into the bewildered English army, triggering a succession of catastrophic losses over the previous twelve months. Edmund Beaufort, in particular, must have celebrated her capture, for although he had been campaigning in the field since his arrival in France in the summer of 1429, he had accomplished little of note. The rise of Joan of Arc had led to fewer opportunities for young Englishmen like Edmund to impose themselves on the war, often forced into defending their position rather than conquering new territory.

Edmund's main task in the summer of 1430 was ensuring the Norman countryside around Rouen was secure in preparation of the arrival of his cousin Henry VI. He participated in the retaking of Château Gaillard in June, while serving as captain of Neufchâtel, Gisors and Gournay to the east of Rouen. It was during this same summer that Edmund was reunited with one of his brothers when Thomas was finally ransomed from the Bourbons by his mother Margaret and uncle Henry. What prompted the change in circumstance that allowed Thomas Beaufort's freedom is unclear, but it's fair to assume the French no longer deemed his continuing imprisonment to be worth their efforts, and opted to cash in on the lesser of their Beaufort prisoners. The cardinal and Margaret received permission from the Council to initiate negotiations with the duchess

of Bourbon on 21 April, and Thomas was released upon payment of 7,000 marks, part of which was raised directly from the cardinal's Church lands in Hampshire.[33]

Nine years of imprisonment had not dulled Thomas's fighting spirit. He had only been a teenager when captured after the Battle of Baugé, but emerged from captivity eager to make up for lost time. A natural soldier keen to prove his worth, in August 1430 Thomas was provided with a retinue of 480 men to support his younger brother Edmund in Normandy,[34] and at the instigation of his cardinal uncle was also granted the French title count of Perche, with the expectation that, in time, both Thomas and Edmund would establish a permanent Beaufort powerbase in north-eastern France. John Beaufort, of course, had their father's Somerset estates to look forward to upon his release, if the time ever came.

Cardinal Beaufort returned to England just before Christmas 1430, and was accompanied by his two nephews, the young counts of Mortain and Perche. It was the first time Thomas had set foot in his homeland in a decade, and presumably there was an emotional reunion between mother and son. Henry was present for the parliament that assembled on 12 January 1431, and took the opportunity to stress the urgent need for reinforcements to safeguard the English position in France. Joan of Arc had been captured, but the threat Charles VII posed remained. As was the cardinal's style, he was naturally persuasive, and secured the troops he required.

His nephews, in particular, benefited; on 19 April 1431 Edmund and Thomas were both appointed captains of the army, and given 128 men-at-arms and 460 archers each. Their cousin Richard Neville, elevated to the earldom of Salisbury in 1428 after the death of his father-in-law, by contrast, was able to summon a force of 800 men.[35] By June, all three Beauforts, with their Beaufort-blooded Neville kinsman, were back in France, with Mortain, Perche and Salisbury advancing to the front line. The cardinal of England, however, had other pressing business to attend to – the final stages of Joan of Arc's trial.

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Since she had been handed over to the English, Joan had endured a long and rigorous imprisonment, unsure of her fate and fearful of sexual assault at the hands of her guards. Her much-awaited trial commenced in February 1431 when a series of public interrogations took place in an ecclesiastic court led by Pierre Cauchon, bishop of Beauvais. Cauchon was closely affiliated with the Burgundians and sympathetic to English interests in France. Furthermore, he had ambitions of becoming archbishop of Rouen, and probably intended to use the trial to prove his suitability for the position. In a clear conflict of interest, it was Joan who had caused the bishop to abandon his See in the summer of 1429 during one of her ferocious campaigns, when he fled to Rouen to seek the protection of her enemies. She would not find a willing ally in Cauchon, who was determined to expose her as a heretic and prove her an instrument of the devil.

The Maid was doomed from the moment the trial started, with Cauchon's role to publicly discredit her and scandalise Charles VII by association. The interrogation sessions focused primarily on Joan's divine visions, which she was hesitant to discuss at length, and covered her penchant for wearing male clothing while cutting her dark hair short like a boy. It was widely considered a sin for a woman to dress like a man, with Deuteronomy 22:5 declaring such an act to be an 'abomination unto the Lord'. Joan's refusal to obey Church authorities in this matter became, in itself, a potential act of heresy.

Although her accusers included the foremost theological minds in English-controlled France, chiefly drawn from the University of Paris, Joan proved more than capable of articulately and bravely countering any attempts to entrap her. Finally, with English patience running thin, on 24 May she was dragged from her cell to a cemetery outside Saint-Ouen Abbey, where she was informed she would be burnt immediately if she did not admit the voices she claimed to hear were delusions, and to cease wearing male clothing. Watching her every move on the scaffold was Henry Beaufort, conspicuous in his crimson cardinal's robes and flanked by the various churchmen who had

participated throughout the trial, including Bishop Cauchon. Having caught sight of the executioner's cart, Joan lost her nerve and tearfully submitted.

The merciless crowd, which included several English lords, demanded her execution, and all eyes turned expectantly to the cardinal, who everyone recognised would have the final say. Cauchon spoke privately with Henry, in whose hands the life of Joan of Arc lay. His decision, conveyed to the people by the bishop of Beauvais, was that Joan should be perpetually imprisoned and not put to death, raising the ire of the bloodthirsty and baying crowd.

The abjuration of Joan of Arc accomplished Henry's mission of discrediting her reputation, in the process making a mockery of Charles VII's claims to have the favour of God. The Maid's recantation was, above all else, a resounding propaganda victory for Cardinal Beaufort and the English king's Council, and there was no pressing need to execute the girl, so long as she returned to her cell and maintained her silence.

She lasted four days. Joan, once more dressing in the tunic, hose and doublet of a man, informed her judges she had heard the voices of saints Margaret and Katherine. This time, the cardinal had no intention of saving Joan. On 30 May 1431, in front of Henry and hundreds of curious onlookers, the Maid of God was tied to a stake in Rouen's bustling marketplace and brutally set alight, bringing grown men to tears as she perished among the flames.[36] The cardinal, ever the consummate administrator and assiduous in covering all eventualities, ordered her ashes to be collected and scattered into the nearby Seine, hoping to avoid her burial site becoming a shrine for any anti-English movements.[37]

A letter from the English camp, in the name of the nine-year-old king but probably overseen by Cardinal Beaufort and John of Bedford, was dispatched throughout Europe, vindicating the execution and claiming Joan had, 'contrary to the divine law, and to the decency becoming her sex, worn the dress of a man, a thing abominable before God'. Her supposed visions, meanwhile, had 'estranged the minds of

persons of both sexes from the truth'. It was further claimed that Joan, 'erroneously called the Maid', had been fairly tried by an independent ecclesiastic court, with no input from secular judges. Her death was ultimately ordered because she was undeniably 'a sorceress of the devil' and a 'blasphemer of God'. It was a shameless attempt to blacken her name and simultaneously embarrass Charles VII for supporting a woman who had been deemed 'guilty of many errors against the faith of Jesus Christ'.[38]

It does need to be considered, however, just why Joan had access to male clothing after her abjuration. Were these purposefully provided to her, in the knowledge she was would incriminate herself? If so, did such orders come from the cardinal in what would have been a particularly devious act of entrapment? Such a possibility can't be completely disregarded. The world of fifteenth-century politics was certainly unscrupulous.

The execution of Joan of Arc was a politically prudent act, eliminating a highly capable military opponent who had caused considerable distress to the English army. Particularly problematic had been Joan's insistence her victories were God's will, something Bedford later put down to 'fals enchantment and sorcerie'.[39] The manner of her trial, however, cast a shadow over English operations in France, and, despite the cardinal's determined efforts, transformed Joan into a martyr for the Armagnac French movement, even though Charles had remained callously indifferent to the plight of his female commander and made no concerted effort to save her life after her capture. Cardinal Beaufort, on the other hand, would forever be known to history as the man who oversaw the burning of Joan of Arc, *le Pucelle de Dieu*.

In Defence of the King
1431–1436

The carefully orchestrated trial and politically expedient execution of Joan of Arc failed to have any significant impact on the immediate war in France, much to Cardinal Beaufort's dismay. The response of the Armagnac French leadership to the news of the Maid's death was muted, and they pressed ahead with their offensive campaign against Bedford's forces.

The cardinal remained in Rouen alongside the young king of England throughout the summer of 1431, overseeing the general administration of Normandy and propping up the regime with another series of loans between June and September, totalling almost £6,000 in gold. When petitioned by Gloucester and the Council in London to defer repayments of pre-existing loans by a few months, the cardinal not only readily agreed, but offered to lend another 10,000 marks to the king, an offer that was accepted.[1] His money was put to good use, prolonging the siege at Louviers and providing funds for King Henry's planned coronation in Paris towards the end of the year. Without Beaufort capital, it is debatable whether either would have been possible, such was the dire state of the crown finances.

Louviers was situated twenty miles south of Rouen and had been recaptured by the French in December 1429, ending a decade of English control. Bedford, now able to concentrate on military matters while Cardinal Beaufort oversaw the more mundane aspects of governance, was infuriated by the loss of a fortress that protected the road between Paris and Rouen, and prioritised its return. One of the men ordered to help retake Louviers was Thomas Beaufort, the king's 'very dear cousin', who was dispatched on 18 May 1431.[2] He would not live to see the town surrender, passing away on 3 October, just three weeks before the conclusion of the five-month siege. The

circumstances of his death, much like that of his elder brother Henry at Rouen in 1418, are unclear. The count of Perche had spent most his adulthood either imprisoned or serving in France, and left no wife or children.[3] It was yet another devastating blow for Margaret Holland, a second son perishing overseas while a third continued to languish in captivity.

The priority for the English council in France was the coronation of Henry VI, a political necessity to counteract the crowning of Charles VII in Reims. Having played a minimal role in the king's first coronation in London, Cardinal Beaufort was determined to be at the forefront of the latest ceremony. The English royal court departed from Rouen at the end of November, defended by a guard of a thousand archers, some on horseback and many on foot. No chances were taken with the king's protection. Conspicuous alongside young Henry each step of the way was the proud cardinal, resplendent, as always, in his flowing red robes and cap, and closely accompanied by his nephew Edmund, count of Mortain. Following were the dukes of Bedford and York, along with the earls of Suffolk, Salisbury, Warwick, Ormonde, Oxford and Huntingdon.

The royal procession arrived into Paris on 2 December 1431, where the young king received a rapturous reception from the fawning Parisian leadership at the gate of St Denis, including eloquent orations and passionate verses extolling the child's regal character. Suitably welcomed, they passed through the gateway under a blue velvet canopy richly decorated with golden *fleurs-de-lys*, and made their way through the crowded streets of the city, adorned on each side with tapestries, while pageants were given on every bridge and port they passed. Just about to turn ten years old, the king must have been engrossed with the entertainment provided in his honour, part of which included a *doppelganger* of the king bearing two crowns, one for France and one for England.

On the morning of 17 December, the king was taken 'in grete triumphe' to Notre-Dame Cathedral, where, 'with al solemnitie, he was anoynted and crouned kyng of Fraunce, by the Cardinal of

Winchester'. The Englishman's participation proved contentious, for the bishop of Paris, Jacques du Chatelier, quite reasonably felt he should have been the one to do the honoured deed in his own church. Henry Beaufort wasn't concerned with such protests, however, and even took it upon himself to personally hand his great-nephew the ancient regalia of France.[4] When the king dined in the evening, the cardinal was seated to his right, always within touching distance of the young boy. Not content with such proximity, the churchman even attempted to further ingratiate himself with the impressionable king when he used the occasion to give his great-nephew a gold ring garnished with a ruby. Whether this gift was regarded with great sentimentality by King Henry is unquestionable, for in 1445 he used it to craft a wedding ring for his new queen, Margaret of Anjou.[5] Throughout the proceedings, no other member of the nobility or Church had been as noticeable as the Cardinal of England.

Henry Beaufort's organisation of the coronation and its subsequent feast was praised in English circles, where it was considered nothing had been omitted, 'that might be bought for golde, nor nothyng was forgotten, that by mannes witte could be invented'.[6] The French, however, were not impressed, with one report tersely noting the coronation was 'more after the English than the French mode'.[7] A local journal writer even went as far as admonishing the quality of the food, before criticising the tournament held to commemorate the coronation the following day, which was thought underwhelming.[8] The abrupt English departure from Paris after only ten days did not help matters, but Bedford's objective of reasserting Henry VI's claim to the French throne had been accomplished. While it wasn't known at the time, the expedition proved to be the only time King Henry visited France, a kingdom he claimed to rule until his death forty years later.

Cardinal Beaufort did not immediately join the royal voyage back to England, electing to visit the Burgundian court in Bruges. Duke Philip had chosen not to attend the coronation in Paris, and the cardinal was keen to reverse Burgundy's recent aloofness. Henry's arrival is marked in the city accounts for February 1432 when gifts of herbs, spices and candles were procured for his use,[9] and he was still

in the Low Countries in April when Burgundy's second wife Isabella of Portugal, daughter of the churchman's half-sister Philippa of Lancaster, gave birth to a son in Ghent. Encouragingly, the cardinal was named as one of the godfathers for the child, christened Josse, and he shrewdly lavished a number of rich gifts upon his niece's baby in hope of appeasing her husband.[10]

It's possible that during his extended visit to Ghent, the cardinal was the subject of a painting by the duke's celebrated court artist, Jan van Eyck. The work is commonly known as *The Portrait of Cardinal Niccolò Albergati* after one of Henry's fellow diplomats, but it seems likely the sitter, an elderly ecclesiastic figure, was in fact the bishop of Winchester. The bareheaded subject, depicted in the crimson, fur-lined robe of a cardinal, has a clean-shaven face with a large rounded nose and intense brown eyes. With thinning hair and a degree of plumpness around the chin, the authoritative figure appears to be around sixty years old and exudes a confident demeanour. Cardinal Albergati was an austere, private man, owing to his lengthy commitment to the strict order of the Carthusians, and it seems out of character for such a man to have commissioned a vanity project, much less own a luxurious fur-lined robe. The worldly and wealthy Cardinal Beaufort, however, had no such qualms. As a regular visitor to the Burgundian court in the early 1430s, from when the painting is considered to date, he had every opportunity to encounter van Eyck and procure his services. Perhaps it had some association with the christening of the duke's son, a gift either to, or from, the cardinal. As there is no surviving name or coat of arms connected to the portrait, however, any definitive identification remains speculative, but it is tantalising to suggest this is the only likeness of the Beaufort cardinal to survive.[11]

There was another reason for the cardinal's delayed return to England, and that was a fresh attempt by the duke of Gloucester to bring about his uncle's ruin. While Henry had been preoccupied in France, a series of council meetings in November 1431 questioned whether or not the cardinal had violated English law by retaining his See of Winchester after his elevation. It was acknowledged that previous English cardinals such as Robert Kilwardby and Simon

Langham had resigned their Sees upon their advancement and therefore, if Henry had unlawfully retained his bishopric since 1427, then he should be compelled to pay back all the revenue he had fraudulently claimed. It was further noted that if the cardinal had not sought permission from the king to be exempt from the jurisdiction of Canterbury, then he was potentially guilty of *praemunire,* the penalty of which was forfeiture of all lands and offices.[12] It wasn't explicitly stated as such, but Henry was, in effect, accused of treason. Not for the first time, he stood to lose everything.

This latest attack was another bold attempt by Gloucester to crush his Beaufort kinsman, and the cardinal's initial response was to order all his treasure to be shipped to him in Flanders, including £20,000 in coin and enough golden pots, chalices and candlesticks to fill four great trunks. The cardinal's probable intention was to abandon his homeland and use his treasure to establish a new base on the Continent, in Normandy, Burgundy or Rome. The plan was thwarted when Gloucester was notified of his uncle's manoeuvring and, on 6 February 1432, the *Mary of Winchelsea* was seized in Sandwich, Kent, directly across the Channel from Flanders where the cardinal waited in expectation of the ship's arrival. Gloucester justified this by claiming Henry had failed to procure the necessary licence to export precious metals and other goods from the country.[13] By the end of the month, the cardinal's allies on the Council, including Chancellor John Kemp, archbishop of York; Treasurer Sir Walter Hungerford; and Lord Privy Seal William Alnwick, were removed from their offices.

Much of Henry Beaufort's influence stemmed from his incomparable wealth, and once his treasure was seized it was inconceivable he wouldn't return to England to clear his name. He had little other choice. The cardinal wrote to the John Welles, Mayor of London, from Ghent on 14 April outlining his intention to return 'aboute the biynnyng of this parlement' and to enquire why he was 'straungely demeened' by the council. Defiantly, he referred to himself in the missive as 'called of Engeland Bysshop of Wynchester'.[14] Despite his advanced years, Henry wasn't going to meekly surrender for Gloucester, nor anyone else for that matter.

The cardinal did return in time for parliament, as promised, and launched a vigorous defence of his honour in presence of the ten-year-old king.[15] The cardinal challenged any accuser, 'whatever might be the estate, rank or dignity' of that person, to step forward and publicly air their grievances to his face. Such defiance did the trick; Gloucester backtracked, and the cardinal was assured by the king he was considered a true and faithful servant.[16] On 19 July 1432, he was formally declared innocent by the Council and all his seized goods were restored to his possession, albeit with an enforced loan of £6,000 to the crown.[17]. It was a small price to pay to escape financial and political ruin.

After his humiliation in 1427, this was unquestionably a victory for the cardinal over the duke, with Gloucester unable to cultivate enough support to destroy his nemesis. Henry Beaufort had been present on the political stage for more than thirty years and with England about to enter a crucial period in the war with France, it was unwise to lose his Europe-wide connections and diplomatic expertise. Much to Gloucester's dismay, England still needed its rich cardinal.

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By the end of 1432, it was abundantly clear to many on the Council that the war in France was financially and politically unsustainable; the treasury was empty, the Normans were starting to resist English dominance and Cardinal Beaufort was struggling to convince Burgundy his long-term future lay with England.

In May 1433, Henry travelled back across the Channel to Saint-Omer to again meet with Duke Philip, hoping to settle any outstanding issues in Anglo-Burgundian relations. Contentiously, he was accompanied by Bedford, towards whom Burgundy remained 'sore greved and angry' for the former's marriage a month earlier to the teenage Jacqueline of Luxembourg, only six months after the death of Bedford's second wife who was Burgundy's beloved sister, Anne. Cardinal Beaufort not only had to convince the duke that England could yet emerge victorious from the war, but had the added

issue of repairing the strained relationship between the former brothers-in-law, being 'very desirous to bring these two dukes to a right understanding with each other'. For once, his efforts were to no avail.[18]

As a visiting guest and royal prince, Bedford expected his host to come to him, whereas Burgundy resented being summoned in such a manner, preferring to meet as equals in a neutral location. It was egotistical posturing by both men, prompting the exasperated cardinal to plead with Burgundy to back down, asking:

> How is this, fair nephew, that you refuse to compliment a prince who is son and brother to a king, by calling on him, when he has taken so much trouble to meet you in one of your own towns, and that you will neither visit nor speak to him?[19]

Burgundy stood his ground, and Bedford departed Saint-Omer in a fury. Far from restoring the alliance, the pride of both men had worsened their relationship while Cardinal Beaufort could only look on in frustration. By June, Bedford was back in England, where he quickly seized control of the Council from Gloucester, who had no choice but to reluctantly submit to precedence. One step behind Bedford was the cardinal, who was promptly reinstated to a council seat for the first time in six years, much to Gloucester's annoyance.

Henry probably played a part in his Beaufort nephews' success in a dispute over land in Wales that summer. In August, John Beaufort's claim to the lands of Sycarth and Glyndwrdwy in Flintshire, North Wales, was challenged by Sir John Scudamore, who claimed he was the rightful owner as they had belonged to Owain Glyn Dwˆr, father of his wife Alice, until the Welshman's forfeiture in 1401. In response, a petition was put to parliament, probably in person by Edmund on behalf of his imprisoned brother John, defending the right of the Beauforts to hold the lands, explaining how they had been granted to their father in 1402. The petition was successful.[20]

Edmund subsequently turned the tables on Scudamore; on 8

August, the count of Mortain had Sir John removed from the constableship of Carmarthen Castle, having demonstrated to the Council that Scudamore was ineligible for the office as he had married a Welshwoman in violation of the Henry IV's 1402 Penal Laws. The post was subsequently granted to Edmund, 'by advice of the council', suggesting of his uncle's involvement in some capacity.[21]

Although a minor provincial dispute, the episode nonetheless highlights the sway the Beauforts held over the lesser gentry, not to mention their determination to protect their interests, no matter how inconsequential. Problems with Gloucester notwithstanding, the family had evolved into one of the most formidable units in the kingdom, and as Scudamore harshly discovered, hardly worth opposing.

In the meantime, Bedford and the cardinal were in agreement that they should persevere with the war, firmly believing it was their solemn duty to ensure Henry VI reached adulthood as sovereign of two kingdoms, rather than just the one. Too many courageous men had died during the conflict to consider any other alternative, including the duke's brothers Henry V and Thomas of Clarence, and the cardinal's Beaufort nephews, also named Henry and Thomas. Gloucester's stinging criticism of their handling of the war effort in recent years only served to strengthen their personal and political bond.

With parliament unwilling to provide grants, and further taxation of the impoverished commons unfeasible, a general appeal for loans was launched. As in previous years, and particularly as he was now part of the Council again, it was the cardinal who led by example by stumping up the largest single contribution. On 10 May 1434, he pledged a payment of 10,000 marks, followed by another on 20 June of £2,000 to personally fund Bedford's return to France. In exchange, Henry was granted possession of a collection of precious royal jewels to hold until repayment, including a rich collar of gold garnished with pearls and diamonds, a jewelled sword of gold known as the Sword of Spain, a golden tablet depicting the Passion of the Christ, a golden

tabernacle, which contained an image of the Virgin Mary; two golden candlesticks covered in emeralds, sapphires and pearls; a brooch containing the arms of St George, and a great ship named *the Tygre*.[22] Given the worrying insolvency of the crown, and the fact the exchequer was now in the cardinal's debt for £21,333, it was a sensible move.

With or without funds, however, the English position in France continued to grow more desperate and there was little Bedford and Beaufort could do. Uprisings in Normandy stretched the already overburdened English resources, while every small town captured was followed by a large town lost. Most worryingly of all, Paris was under increasing threat from the Armagnacs. As the Lancastrian phase of the Hundred Years War entered its third decade, a yearning for lasting peace prompted several treaties across the Continent but, ominously for the English, all were contracted with Charles VII, recognition of his growing acceptance as king of France. Sigismund, recently crowned Holy Roman Emperor in Rome, agreed peace with Charles in May 1434, followed by Jean V, duke of Brittany, in June. Finally, in September 1435 at the Congress of Arras, Burgundy formally turned his back on his long-time English allies and made peace with the Armagnacs, ending a bitter sixteen-year feud.

The aim of the Congress, which commenced in July 1435, was to discuss an extended truce between England and Charles VII, with the English hoping to retain their territorial gains since 1415 while arranging a marriage between Henry VI and an unspecified French princess. The Armagnacs came to Arras in a position of strength, however, and were in no mood for concessions. Rather than give the English king a bride or lands, Charles's envoys instead demanded Henry renounce all claim to the throne of France and instruct his army to leave the kingdom. It was a request for total surrender, a concept unfathomable to the young son of Henry V, or his brother Bedford for that matter.

While the discussions faltered, Cardinal Beaufort belatedly arrived in Arras on 19 August with a retinue of three hundred men, and was

met on the outskirts of the town by the dukes of Burgundy and Gueldres, the counts of St Pol, de Ligny and de Meurs, and most of the Burgundian nobility, who afforded the cardinal to an honourable reception worthy of a great prince. Escorted to the Bishop's Palace by Burgundy, who showed his guest 'the greatest respect', it gave the cardinal a chance to engage the duke in brief conversation about Philip's intentions regarding the French. Henry clearly hoped to persuade his friend not to abandon the English cause, and his late arrival to the Congress suggests he wasn't too invested in the outcome of the talks, but rather to beseech the duke not to renege on his oath.[23]

The cardinal's presence in Arras did not alter the English position; they would not, under any circumstance, renounce Henry VI's claim to the throne of France. At one stage during the tense negotiations, the English envoys, having sought the advice of their cardinal, complained the discussions were becoming 'ridiculous and derisive'. With no room for compromise on either side, the talks collapsed on 1 September and war was resumed. That same evening, Burgundy hosted a splendid banquet in honour of his English guests, which, for the tireless cardinal, represented a final opportunity to appeal to the duke not to switch sides.

Once dinner was consumed, Cardinal Beaufort sought out his host in the middle of the hall, where he shamelessly implored his old friend to renew the alliance. The two men, out of earshot of the rest of the guests, talked openly and honestly with each other about their predicament, with the cardinal desperately appealing to the duke's heart, if not his head. Bedford may have offended the duke by remarrying shortly after the death of Philip's sister, but Charles had been directly involved in the murder of his father on the bridge at Montereau. Surely the duke was not willing to overlook this fact? Yes, he was suffering heavy financial losses from the war, and it was true his lands were increasingly threatened by the Armagnacs, but surely, the cardinal urged, Burgundy could see that England were his true friends, not Charles.

The intense discussion lasted an hour, causing the stressed cardinal to sweat profusely from his forehead. The impromptu summit was only broken up when members of the court discreetly intervened with wines and spices.[24] The exhausted cardinal had given it his all, but his efforts proved fruitless; he left for England on 6 September having failed to sway the duke and, two weeks later, Burgundy signed the Treaty of Arras with Charles. A letter was composed to Henry VI by the duke outlining his reasons for the defection; pointedly, the recipient was only referred to as king of England, rather than of France as in previous communication between the two men, causing the boy's eyes to become 'filled with tears, which ran down his cheeks'.[25]

Henry Beaufort had other worries apart from the collapse of his personal and political bond with Burgundy, however, for on 14 September 1435, the duke of Bedford passed away in Rouen, aged forty-six. Within the space of a fortnight, the cardinal had lost two of his most influential friends, and in Bedford, a man 'as politique in peace, as hardy in warre',[26] England had lost her foremost military leader and senior adult royal figure. It may very well have been the fortnight that England also lost France.

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As the autumn of 1435 turned to winter, Cardinal Beaufort and his nephew Edmund must have been filled with a sense of trepidation about the future. Much of the elderly churchman's influence over the previous five years had been a byproduct of his connections with Bedford and Burgundy, the loss of which left him isolated against the enmity of Gloucester. English territory in Normandy was lost throughout September and October, including Pont de Meulan, Dieppe, Fécamp, Tancarville, Montivilliers and Harfleur, and England stood politically alienated after the Congress of Arras. Brittany, Burgundy, the Holy Roman Empire and even the Papacy openly acknowledged, and even endorsed, the claim of Charles VII, and only the most optimistic Englishman believed the war in France remained

winnable.

Whether through maturity or the sudden pressure of finding himself the sole living son of Henry IV, Gloucester did not launch another attack on the cardinal, as expected. Rather, both men were forced into an uneasy alliance in the hope they could salvage the dire situation in France. Of course, the fact Gloucester still lacked support among his fellow nobles to deal a fatal blow to the cardinal probably played a part, as did Henry Beaufort's amiable relationship with his royal great-nephew, now almost fourteen years old. Furthermore, as Bedford had died without legitimate issue, like Clarence before him, Gloucester was now heir apparent to the crown. It wasn't in his interest to seek the destruction of the kingdom's most experienced, and richest, politician while everyone adjusted to life after Bedford.

In early 1436 the Council was forced to address the defence of Normandy, and a new army was assembled under the command of the twenty-four-year-old Richard, duke of York, along with the earls of Salisbury and Suffolk. Added to this esteemed list of lords, possibly as a concession to the cardinal, was Edmund Beaufort, count of Mortain, recruited to serve in Maine and Anjou for two years. On 9 December 1435, Edmund had been granted the office of captain and constable of Aberystwyth Castle in recognition of his 'good service in the wars of France', and it was anticipated he would continue to excel across the Channel.[27] He was provided with a force of around 2,000 men, largely funded by his uncle, and only smaller than the retinue of York. Although all four men would later become embroiled in deadly conflict with one another, in 1436 Richard Plantagenet, Richard Neville, William de la Pole and Edmund Beaufort were united in a common goal.

While other commanders were delayed because of financial and logistical issues, Edmund's army departed from Winchelsea on time in April, albeit heading for Calais rather than Maine as initially planned. With Burgundy now adopting an aggressive stance towards England, it was anticipated he would launch a largescale attack on Calais, just sixty miles along the coast from the ducal court of Bruges. Losing

Calais was inconceivable to Gloucester, and he ordered Edmund to rally, as the *Brut Chronicle* put it, to the 'defence of our Kyng, and to destroye oure enemys'.[28]

Rather than concentrating merely on fortifying the town, Edmund boldly assumed an aggressive approach towards the Burgundians and conducted several fleeting raids into Flanders, risky behaviour not unlike that previously exhibited by his uncle Exeter almost twenty years earlier. On one particular foray, Edmund invaded Looberghe, where he 'ryfled and spoilet the cuntry' before stealing a large number of cattle. On the way back, while passing Gravelines, he encountered some resistance from the locals and a skirmish erupted on the nearby beach. The English soldiers, heavily armed and well prepared, had little trouble in overcoming their ill-equipped and rashly assembled challengers, who were slain in large numbers before attempting to flee back into the town. It was to no avail; the Flemings were furiously pursued by Edmund and his men, with those lucky to survive taken prisoner.

Satisfied with his plunder, the count marched his men and cattle back to Calais, having incurred no notable causalities during the expedition. It was even said that Edmund had captured so many cows that the price of milk in Calais plummeted.[29] His efforts did not go unrecognised, and on 5 May 1436 he was rewarded with induction into the Order of the Garter, replacing the recently deceased earl of Arundel and becoming the third Beaufort male to be elected to the Order, after his father John and uncle Thomas. The Order insignia, including the prestigious blue velvet garter, was dispatched directly to Calais.[30]

Burgundy was not intimidated by Edmund Beaufort's audacity, or by his induction into the Garter. The duke assembled a vast army and swiftly captured the towns of Oye, Balingham and Marck before heading westward towards Edmund and Calais.

Reaching the town ahead of Burgundy was an English archer named William Bullion, who claimed he had been briefly imprisoned after the fall of Oye before being released without ransom. Beaufort's

suspicions were aroused by Bullion's sudden reappearance just before Burgundy's expected attack, and he had the archer tossed back in jail. The count's uncertainty was vindicated when Bullion confessed he had been freed on condition he spied for Burgundy, although the archer stressed he had never intended on honouring any oath. Edmund took no chances, and sent a ruthless message to Burgundy, and any other spies in his camp, by ordering Bullion's execution in the middle of the marketplace.[31]

The Burgundians finally appeared outside Calais on 9 July, and erected a timber bulwark on a hill overlooking the town. Twenty ships were also placed off the coast, with the plan to besiege the town on two fronts in a pincer movement. The port's capture should have been straightforward, but Phillip's army was beset with internal rivalries and failed to focus on the task at hand. The sea blockade was botched when Flemish soldiers refused to move within range of the town, and on 12 July Edmund took advantage of his enemies' disarray by courageously emerging from the town at the head of a small but determined force, heading straight towards the timber bulwark. The swiftness of the attack made the Burgundians panic and they turned on their heels and fled from the field. Those who failed to escape were slaughtered where they stood, and the bulwark was razed to the ground. Edmund ordered any soldier captured alive to be put to death in retaliation for the earlier killing of an Englishman captured by the Flemish.[32] It was brutal, but decisive, leadership.

The successful defence of Calais was an astounding victory for Edmund Beaufort, and although it was aided by the incompetency of the Burgundians, it enhanced his reputation as a capable military commander in the mould of his uncle Exeter. It was the least expected from a man now charged with upholding the martial reputation of the Beauforts while his elder brother John remained in captivity.

The Burgundians' embarrassing retreat was celebrated in rhyme by boastful English scribes, with several scornful songs widely recited in the following years. One, in particular, known as the *Mockery of the Flemings*, addressed the Flemish soldiers while praising the valour of

Edmund Beaufort after the clash on the beach near Gravelines:

> Ye laid upon Englisshmen so myghtily with your handes,
> Til of you iii hundrid lay strechid on the sandes.
> Ye fled then into Gravenyng, and wold no lenger bide,
> And gave the Erle leve to passe over that same tyde[33]

Another composition, *On the Siege of Calais*, also celebrated the prowess of Beaufort, depicting him addressing his troops on the eve of battle:

> The Erle of Morteyne mad a diner,
> And, Felowys, be of good chere!
> Off no thyng hav we no dred,
> I trust to God to se that day,
> That, for alle the proud aray,
> Fulle low schalle thay lowth.[34]

The events of the summer of 1436 firmly established the count of Mortain as one of the leading English commanders of his generation. It was not an ideal period to be at the forefront of the conflict, but he had little choice but to make the best of a dismal situation. The majority of the Beaufort inheritance was reserved for his elder brother John, and it was anticipated service in France would lead to further titles and offices to add to those he had already accumulated. His uncle Thomas Beaufort had advanced from constable to earl and from earl to duke, so it was conceivable that, over time, Edmund would emulate his prestigious kinsman as another younger son with considerable ability. As always, he could count on the support of his uncle, the cardinal of England.

The Mediator of Peace
1436–1439

While the Beaufort men were preoccupied with the instability of the English position across the Channel, the Beaufort women had complex concerns of their own, entwined with the fortunes of their husbands and children.

After the death of her husband Ralph Neville in 1424, Joan Beaufort was left to oversee the vast Beaufort-Neville estates in the north and further the ambitions of the many children she'd had with the deceased earl of Westmorland. By the early 1430s the dowager countess was a grandmother many times over, with the advenatageous marriages of her offspring conveniently providing her cardinal brother with far-reaching connections at every level of English society.

Her eldest Beaufort-Neville daughter Katherine also became a widow in October 1432 after the death of her husband John Mowbray, 2nd Duke of Norfolk. Their son, also named John, succeeded to his father's title as the 3rd Duke at only seventeen years old.

Joan's second daughter with Westmorland, Eleanor, had several children with Henry Percy, 2nd Earl of Northumberland and Richard Neville had several children with Alice Montague, through whom he gained the earldom of Salisbury in 1428. Robert Neville became bishop of Salisbury in 1427 and Durham in 1436, while William Neville received the Fauconberg estates through his marriage to the baron's heiress, Joan.

Anne Neville followed in her elder sisters' footsteps by also securing a good marriage, in her case to Humphrey Stafford, earl of Stafford and a great-grandson of Edward III. In 1438, Stafford was granted the earldom of Buckingham after the death of his mother, so Lady Anne subsequently presided over one of the finest noble courts in

the kingdom.

Edward Neville, meanwhile, married a Beauchamp daughter of the earl of Worcester while George Neville, who inherited his half-uncle's Latimer baronetcy in 1430, married a Beauchamp daughter of the earl of Warwick. The youngest daughter, Cecily, made the finest marital match, however, when in the spring of 1429 she wed Richard, duke of York, the wealthiest magnate in England.

Through Joan Beaufort's offspring, therefore, her family had connections to the Nevilles, Percys, Fauconbergs, Staffords, Montacute and the House of York, plus many other gentry families into which her grandchildren would marry.

Such prestige did not prevent the countess falling foul of her husband's first family, in particular her step-grandson, the namesake of her husband, Ralph. The younger Ralph had succeeded his grandfather to the earldom of Westmorland, but once he reached his majority he grew increasingly bitter that much of the larger, more profitable Neville estates, including Middleham, Raby, Richmond and Sheriff Hutton castles, were in possession of his Beaufort-Neville half-uncles. While his grandfather had become the richest noble in the north, with property and influence spanning the entire region, the new earl, by comparison, had little but his title, and launched a vigorous campaign to recover what he deemed to be his lost inheritance. Joan Beaufort, with help from her son Salisbury, stubbornly resisted.

After a series of threatening verbal exchanges between the two sides, on 18 August 1430 at York, the young earl and dowager countess were censured by the Council and both bound by an initial bond of £2,000 to maintain the peace, later renewed for increased bonds of £4,000 on 16 May 1431 and 6 November 1434.[1] Both parties were ordered not to cause any 'hurt or harm' to the other, and further forbidden from trespassing on lands which belonged to their adversary. With the English campaign in France floundering, the last thing the Council needed was a Neville civil war in the north.

Westmorland's resentment could not be permanently contained,

however, and tensions resurfaced in 1434 after he was notified by his grandfather's former clerk about a box of documents relating to the family inheritance, supposedly including an early will of the 1st Earl that supported his grandson's claims. The mysterious box had been deposited in Durham Priory around 1400, and Westmorland dispatched some retainers to retrieve it from the prior, John Wessington. The churchman refused, preferring instead to alert Joan Beaufort of its existence. The countess promptly informed her brother Henry, and the cardinal pugnaciously took up the cause of his younger sister.

On 7 August 1435, Henry took advantage of his status and wrote to Wessington advising him his soul was in serious peril if he did not hand over the documents to his sister, while the bishop of Durham, Thomas Langley, a close associate of the cardinal's, also threatened the prior with ecclesiastical censure if he refused. The fact that no known copy of the will exists suggests that Beaufort efforts in suppressing the documents were probably successful. Wessington, like most of the country, had discovered at first hand the intimidating influence the Beauforts were capable of exerting.[2]

In early 1436, two of Joan's sons, Richard and William Neville, were due to cross to France to aid the defence of Normandy, but the pair declared they would only serve abroad if they received the consent of their mother. The cause of such an unusual request was the fear that Westmorland would attack Joan and her lands in their absence, and possibly even harm the dowager countess. The Council summoned Joan and Westmorland to appear before them at Westminster, when the proud fifty-six-year-old matriarch of the Beaufort-Nevilles declared 'she gave her consent to her said children serving, subject to certain conditions which she put in writing'. Those conditions centred around a promise from Westmorland, given in the presence of the king on 28 February 1436, that he wouldn't seek to harm the defenceless countess or her lands while her sons were abroad.

This temporary truce was not the end of a dispute that endured for

forty years. Two years later, Westmorland was still protesting about the issue, prompting both parties to again be called before the Council on 28 December 1438 after the protracted rivalry started to violently manifest itself. It was around this period that Westmorland married for the second time, to Margaret Cobham, a union that brought the earl into the circle of his new brother-in-law, Humphrey of Gloucester. Was the duke prodding Westmorland to aggravate Cardinal Beaufort? It seems likely. The king, having become aware 'that disputes have arisen', was deeply concerned at the 'slaughter and ruin of the people' in the north, 'in contempt of the king and breach of the peace', and commanded hostilities to cease. Joan, Salisbury and George Neville, Baron Latimer, were again bound over to keep the peace, as were Westmorland and two of his brothers.[3] The matter, however, remained unresolved.

Other than fighting off the unwelcome Westmorland, Joan also turned her attention to honouring the memory of her mother Katherine Swynford, as well as to thoughts of her own death. On 28 November 1437, she was granted a licence from the king for the foundation of a chantry with two chaplains in Lincoln Cathedral to pray daily for Katherine's soul, as well as for herself, her husband Ralph, her brother the cardinal and her father John of Gaunt. On the same day, she also secured a grant for daily prayers to be said for the souls of her husband, brother and father in Staindrop Church, near Raby Castle.[4]

Across the border in Scotland, the life of her namesake niece Joan was just as, if not more, tumultuous. Although her marriage to King James appeared outwardly harmonious, the royal couple presided over a kingdom beset by internal strife and dynastic rivalry. Nevertheless, Joan found time to send twelve casks of Scottish salt salmon to her mother Margaret on 7 August 1432.[5]

As queen, Joan's chief duty was providing her husband with children to continue the Stewart line; three daughters were born in quick succession before she gave birth to twin male heirs Alexander and James, though the former died soon after birth. Three further

daughters followed thereafter. The eldest of the brood, Margaret, was touted as a potential bride for the heir of Charles VII of France as early as 1428, but it was only on 25 June 1436, after the expiration of a seven-year truce between England and Scotland, that the marriage was concluded in Tours, presumably against the wishes of Joan's brothers and cardinal uncle. The princess was only eleven years old at the time, but her union with the thirteen-year-old French dauphin Louis solidified the alliance between Scotland and France, at the expense of England and the queen's Beaufort kinsmen. The marriage proved to be an unhappy one, for Margaret died in 1445 at the age of twenty, failing to become a queen like her mother.

On the evening of 20 February 1437, Joan's tenure as the queen of Scotland came to a 'very cruel and surprising' end when a band of assassins, dispatched by the king's estranged uncle Walter Stewart, earl of Atholl, invaded the Dominican Friary in Perth just after midnight and cornered the terrified royal couple in their lodgings. James attempted to flee but was quickly apprehended, subdued and 'most barbarously assassinated'. Though 'villainously wounded in two places', Joan survived and was able to spirit her six-year-old son James to Edinburgh. Once the shock of the attack wore off and her wounds healed, a vengeful Joan resolved to crush her husband's murderers and secure her son's place on his throne. She proved successful; Atholl overestimated the level of support he had among his peers, and was swiftly captured, imprisoned and tortured. On 25 March, young James was crowned and anointed king in Holyrood Abbey, becoming James II of Scotland and the first Beaufort blooded male to accede to a throne, a quarter century before Edward IV and almost half a century before Richard III and Henry VII. The following day, Atholl was dragged naked through the streets, before he was disembowelled, beheaded and quartered.[6]

Basing herself at Dunbar Castle on the East Lothian coast with each of her children save for Margaret, Joan intended to personally govern Scotland as her son's regent, but was met with fierce opposition from the Scottish nobles. The king's mother was not merely a woman, but English, with extensive familial connections at the court of Scotland's

ancient enemy. Archibald Douglas, 5th Earl of Douglas and the first cousin of the king, was preferred as regent, and Joan had to be content with the guardianship of her son. It wasn't in the Beaufort nature to remain in the shadows, however, and in July 1439 Joan re-emerged onto the political scene after her marriage to a knight named James Stewart.

The death of Douglas a month earlier had deprived Joan of a powerful ally at court, and in the ensuing power struggle she was imprisoned in Stirling Castle. The price of her freedom was to hand over custody of her son, and her considerable dowry, to her captor, Sir Alexander Livingstone. Defeated and forced into retreat, Joan later gave birth to another three sons with her second husband while also overseeing the marriages of her royal daughters. Princess Joan was betrothed to the earl of Angus in 1440, Isabella married Francis I, duke of Brittany in 1442, and Mary wed Wolfert VI of Borselen in 1444, further spreading the Beaufort pedigree across northern Europe.

In the summer of 1445, tensions finally turned violent after Sir James clashed with Livingstone, prompting the latter to besiege Joan and her husband in Dunbar. The king's mother didn't survive the attack, passing away on 15 July. The Beaufort queen of Scotland was buried in the Carthusian priory in Perth next to her first husband, while her second fled into England with their three sons to seek refuge. Joan had lived and died a fighter and, as expected from a Beaufort, fought to the bitter end for her family. How her brothers or uncle viewed proceedings from afar is not known, but there was little retribution sought for her death, within and without Scotland.[7]

Meanwhile, Margaret Beaufort, Joan's sister and the youngest daughter of John, 1st Earl of Somerset, also endured difficulties due to her marriage. After being betrothed at the age of twelve to Thomas Courtenay, 13th Earl of Devon, once married she gave birth to her first son around a decade later, with two sons and five daughters following in quick succession. Any semblance of a peaceful existence came to a shuddering halt towards the end of the 1430s when regional rivalry between Margaret's husband and the Bonvilles escalated into

armed conflict, with Courtenay in particular attacking property belonging to his adversaries. Although not directly a part of the later Wars of the Roses, the enmity between the two families in the south-west resulted in two decades of battling for supremacy in Devon, a scenario that engulfed Margaret's entire family and culminated in a violent encounter at Clyst Heath in December 1455. The lives of the Beaufort women were anything but tranquil.

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The queen of Scotland and the countess of Devon weren't the only Beauforts focused on raising a family in the 1430s. By 1435, their brother Edmund was close to thirty years old, and while his elder sibling John remained a French captive, the future of the line depended on the count of Mortain siring sons. As a soldier frequently serving abroad in perilous scenarios, Edmund was undoubtedly aware he could be killed in action at any moment, recalling how two of his brothers had already died in France without leaving any heirs.

It was perhaps such thoughts that prompted Edmund to take a wife in the middle of the decade, although the clandestine nature of the wedding has obscured the precise date and location. His choice of bride was Eleanor Beauchamp, daughter of Richard Beauchamp, 13th Earl of Warwick, and the widow of Thomas, 8th Baron Ros of Helmsley, with whom she had three children, including her eldest Thomas, the underage 9th Baron. Edmund had married Lady Eleanor without obtaining the required permission. However, when the couple's first son was born in early 1436, the king stood as godfather to his cousin's baby. This was a tacit approval of the union, later publicly recognised on 7 March 1438 after the end of the minority when Edmund was formally pardoned by Henry 'for intermarrying without the king's licence'.[8]

As per tradition, the child was baptised Henry, named after his religious sponsor, although it was a name probably also chosen with the elderly cardinal in mind, as he may have interceded on his nephew's behalf to secure the pardon.[9] Three daughters soon

followed, named Eleanor, Elizabeth and Margaret, before a second son, Edmund, named for his father, secured the future of the Beaufort dynasty before the decade was over.

In the meantime, Cardinal Beaufort was once more tirelessly politicking on the Council, wholly invested in advancing the interests of his expanding family. He was a regular in meetings throughout 1437 and retained his place on 12 November when the king formally assumed the reins of government, one month before his sixteenth birthday. This was not necessarily an issue for the cardinal; Gloucester was no longer recognised as chief councillor, while Henry had cultivated a close relationship with his impressionable great-nephew, to whom he was a valued confidante and advisor. Conveniently, the Council featured a number of the cardinal's supporters, including Archbishop Kemp, Bishop Alnwick, the earls of Salisbury, Stafford and Suffolk, and the lords Tiptoft and Hungerford. Although some council members were closely aligned with Gloucester, it was clear the balance of power had shifted in favour of Henry Beaufort once more.[10]

One crucial matter the Council had yet to resolve was the duke of Bedford's replacement as lieutenant in France and Normandy. The duke of York had temporarily fulfilled the post until April 1437, but he appeared keen to return to his vast estates in England and Wales and had little desire to continue on a permanent basis. Gloucester was deemed unsuitable for a position with considerable overseas military responsibility, with the cardinal unwilling to support his rival receiving such military responsibility, so as a temporary compromise, Edmund Beaufort's Beauchamp father-in-law, the elderly Warwick, was handed the office. The position was less attractive than it should have been; the post was poorly funded, and there was a lack of soldiers and equipment available to sustain the campaign. Paris had been lost in April 1436. Nonetheless, the cardinal had long-term ambitions for the office, hoping to convince the Council to reserve the position for his nephew John, the still-imprisoned earl of Somerset.

Somerset's release was a priority for Henry as he entered his

sixties, particularly as his eldest Beaufort nephew had been a prisoner since 1421, spending almost half his life in captivity. Charles VII's council had been unwilling to consider the release of Somerset without opening negotiations to release several French nobles who were languishing in English confinement, a scenario inconceivable while Henry VI remained underage. Once the king reached his teens, however, steps were slowly being taken by the Beauforts in preparation for the earl's eventual release.

On 7 February 1435, John Holland, earl of Huntingdon and Constable of the Tower of London, was ordered to transfer Charles, count of Eu, into the custody of Edmund Beaufort, ready for a prisoner exchange in the near future.[11] A year later, on 9 February 1436, it was decreed Somerset should formally purchase the rights of Eu from the crown for 12,000 marks, while in April 1437, Edmund was granted a licence to convey the Frenchman across the Channel to further discuss his release. Gilbert de Lafayette, Charles VII's Marshal of France, meanwhile, was handed a safe conduct by the English council on 6 December 1437 to bring Somerset into English-held France. It was clearly a complicated and protracted affair that Somerset later complained had cost him a total of £24,000, but nonetheless, by the autumn of 1438 the earl was finally freed after seventeen years as a prisoner.[12]

Edmund Beaufort had other distractions throughout 1438, because by spring the Burgundians were again threatening English lands, particularly targeting the town of Guînes. On 22 March, a fortnight after he was pardoned for his unlicensed marriage, the count was indentured for six months' service overseas, and orders were given three days later for several vessels to be ready in Poole by St George's Day (23 April) to transport him to France, although mustering of his forces didn't take place until early May.[13]

Edmund's army numbered 346 men-at-arms and 1,350 archers, and with the English exchequer still struggling to fund such expeditions, his uncle intervened with a loan of £7,333 6*s* 8*d*. The payment was ostensibly provided 'for the relief of Guînes and for the

army which shall hastily be sent to the realm of France and duchy of Normandy', although the inspiration behind the cardinal's benevolence was to ensure his nephew had another opportunity to excel on the frontlines. Noticeably, both the loan and indenture referred to the expedition's commander not as count of Mortain, but rather as earl of Dorset.[14] Although Edmund wasn't formally created earl until 29 August 1442,[15] probably owing to the crown's financial difficulties, it was nonetheless another bold statement of support from the king for his cousin, of whom much was clearly expected.

The earldom raised Edmund to the level of his brother John, and was ample reward for his resilient defence of Calais a few years previously. The Dorset title was particularly apt, for it was the same earldom held by his uncle Thomas, a soldier the new earl hoped to emulate in the field. His father John had also briefly held the title Marquis of Dorset during the reign of Richard II, while the family retained significant connections to the county, not least Corfe Castle on the south coast.

On 21 July 1438, Dorset received another significant grant when he was appointed Constable of Windsor Castle and Keeper of all the forests and parks that surrounded the royal fortress. At the same time, he was also regranted the constableships of Carmarthen and Aberystwyth Castles along with the stewardship of the Gwidigada and Elfed hundreds in Carmarthenshire, a useful boost to his income and solidifying his position in west Wales. The Windsor grant was particularly noteworthy as the castle was closely associated with his royal cousin, having been where the king was born and primarily raised during his lengthy minority.

The position, at the heart of the royal household, was only entrusted to those deemed trustworthy and reliable, men capable of fulfilling a role that required considerable military knowledge and administrative experience. As constable, Dorset was responsible for the safekeeping and maintenance of the castle while ensuring all local rents were paid and the wages of royal servants settled. To this end, on 28 February 1439, the earl was expected to provide stonemasons,

carpenters, tilers and labourers to rebuild and repair part of the castle, along with the manors of Henley, Guildford and Easthampstead. On 23 August 1440, he secured an additional annuity of £500 from the Council for the 'repairs, improvements, buildings and defects of the said castle', and authority to purchase iron, charcoal, nails, lead and tin to complete the task.[16] Dorset was also provided with his own lodgings at Windsor, although the day-to-day role was generally fulfilled by several deputies, allowing the earl to concentrate on more weighty matters elsewhere. Although not his main priority, the position was unquestionably a prestigious appointment for Edmund Beaufort, a status symbol even, and one he held until his death.

Just as Dorset was preparing for his departure to Normandy, news reached the earl that his father-in-law Warwick had negotiated a temporary truce with the Burgundians, prompting him to divert his forces towards Maine where he intended to capture territory formerly held by the duke of Bedford. Edmund's army landed at Cherbourg and steadily advanced south through the Cotentin Peninsula. He captured the towns of Saint-Aignan-sur-Roe, defended by 300 Scots, and Le Guerche, the latter lost as quickly as it was won 'by mysgovernaunce'. Dorset, perhaps wary of overcommitting his forces and wanting to recuperate through the Christmas period, negotiated a four-year truce with the duke of Alençon and count of Maine before the end of December, securing his gains on one hand but prompting one critical chronicler to denounce the campaign as accomplishing 'but lytell good'.[17]

Edmund took advantage of the respite to establish his headquarters in Alençon while construction was started on a new fortress in Elbeuf, a small town on the banks of the Seine and only a few miles upriver from Rouen.[18] It seems the Beaufort desire to be recognised as Norman lords was, at least, an achievable ambition. When word reached London of Dorset's impromptu campaign, however, Gloucester was infuriated, interpreting the diversion from Calais and Guînes to be a waste of vital military resources. The royal duke was probably justified in his outrage, for it was clear the Maine expedition was conducted with the advancement of the Beaufort family in mind,

rather than the defence of Normandy.

The general whereabouts of John Beaufort after his release is unclear, although according to the *Croyland Chronicle* the earl visited one of his manors at Deeping for the first time shortly after his return to England. His arrival in the south Lincolnshire Fens caused the local population to flock to his side, joyously proclaiming Beaufort 'lord of the marsh'. Somerset was 'puffed up by the great applause of the populace' while his 'heart was elevated to a loft pitch' by the warm reception. The chronicler grew critical of Somerset's lordship, however, complaining that 'tolls were levied by his servants in the vills' while 'all the cattle were driven away'. A dispute also erupted between Somerset and the abbot of Croyland when the earl unwisely ordered the construction of an embankment between his manor and a stone boundary marker known as Kenulph's Stone. The earl said the monks were forbidden from using the embankment to transport goods to and from the abbey. The indignant abbot, John Litlington, protested to the king, which only served to increase the earl's wrath. The underlying cause of Somerset's issue with the monastery, or the outcome of the conflict, however, remains unknown.[19]

On 6 January 1439, Somerset was present alongside King Henry at Kenilworth to celebrate Twelfth Night in England for the first time in almost two decades. It provided the earl an opportunity to get to know his monarch, having been captured nine months before his royal cousin was born. It seems likely Somerset also spent a considerable amount of time in the company of his mother Margaret, who for so long had been separated from her eldest surviving son. On 26 February, meanwhile, the earl dined with his cardinal uncle at Eltham Palace, with Somerset's return to France a topic of conversation.[20] He may have spent most of his adulthood in captivity, but his title afforded John Beaufort the status of one of the kingdom's foremost nobles, and as a great-grandson of Edward III, it was highly anticipated he would lead an English army against the French.

There is reason to suggest Somerset did not need encouragement to take up the challenge. Like his brother Thomas before him, John had

much to prove to his compatriots, having been captured in 1421 before he had accomplished anything of note. Although there is no suggestion of animosity between the brothers, it was surely frustrating for Somerset, as nominal head of the family, to witness his younger sibling Edmund develop into one of England's most able commanders during his absence.

Somerset departed for France in March 1439 and had barely settled into camp when on 22 April, Warwick, the temporary lieutenant across the Channel, passed away. The Beaufort brothers reunited in Rouen, and together assumed military command of the English operation until further orders from the king were forthcoming, also claiming seats on the Council alongside the cardinal. Other councillors included their cousin William Neville, Lord Fauconberg, and Edmund's brother-in-law John, Lord Talbot. Through chance rather than design, the Beauforts appeared on the cusp of realising the cardinal's long-held ambition to carve out a corner of Lancastrian France for themselves. Somerset had even collected several captaincies, including the towns of Cherbourg, Renneville, Avranches, Tombelaine and Falaise, giving him almost complete autonomy in the Cotentin Peninsula.[21] With his nephews finally making progress in northern France, Cardinal Beaufort turned his attentions towards arranging a lasting peace with the French. Negotiating from a weaker position than his adversary, it wasn't going to be an easy task.

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Although not universally supported in England, the cardinal's predilection for peace with France did, crucially, have the backing of the seventeen-year-old king, who astutely acknowledged his treasury could not finance the war effort indefinitely. With each passing year the amount of territory England governed in France markedly declined, while the interruption of sea trade with the Burgundians was proving costly to all involved in the wool industry, not least the cardinal himself. Negotiations at Arras in 1435 had been disastrous, but it was hoped a new round of discussions could produce more

positive results. It was an optimistic stance, but the alternative was unthinkable to those involved in great victories under Henry V and the duke of Bedford. Lancastrian France was crumbling, and despite reservations, a truce was essential.

With Archbishop Kemp, Cardinal Beaufort crossed the Channel to Gravelines in December 1438 to hold preliminary discussions with the Burgundians about the resumption of trade. It wasn't the duke himself that Henry met but rather Duchess Isabel, daughter of the cardinal's half-sister, Philippa of Lancaster. Although born and raised in Portugal, Isabel was very much a Lancastrian princess; she was learned, well read, a keen hunter, proficient in multiple languages including English, and, above all, politically savvy. Her marriage to Burgundy in 1429 was intended to solidify the Anglo-Burgundian alliance, and now, a decade later, she was dispatched to restore relations between the two parties.

Although no formal treaty was arranged between uncle and niece at the December summit, another conference was arranged in the new year with an invitation extended to Charles VII. Cardinal Beaufort and Duchess Isabel were to lead the talks, with the Englishman, in his capacity as an experienced prelate of the Church, grandly expected to be a 'mediatour and sterer to the peace'.[22]

Before he had departed from England, the cardinal struck a controversial deal with the king to purchase large amounts crown land. However, although the sale provided a much-needed cash injection into the royal coffers it exposed Beaufort to accusations he had taken advantage of the kingdom's financial difficulties for personal gain. The truth is a little less conspiratorial. Henry had long been the crown's leading creditor, having lent considerable sums of money stretching back over three decades. He always received some form of security on his loans, although by 1439 there was little left for the impoverished crown to give.

On 25 May 1439, the cardinal submitted an offer for the north Welsh castle, manor and lordship of Chirk, which was accepted by the Council, along with the manors of Canford, Poole, Henstridge, South

Charlton, Amesbury, Winterbourne and Wilton in the English south-west. The total cost to the cardinal was 13,350 marks.[23] Gloucester later alleged his uncle had willingly defrauded the crown, while the judge John Fortescue bemoaned such sale of the king's lands to be to the 'delapidacion of his crowne, and therefore is off grete infame'.[24]

This criticism seems unfair; Gloucester's stance was complicated by his unrelenting hatred of his uncle, but later condemnation fails to consider the wider context of the sale. The crown desperately needed funds, and the lands purchased by the cardinal were, at best, of minor importance to the king. Chirk had only come into royal hands during the reign of Henry V, purchased for 4,000 marks in July 1418. It was not an ancient royal lordship and had no sentimental value to the Lancastrian dynasty. In fact, it seems likely the cardinal had been generous in what he paid for the property. The 13,350 marks were certainly put to good use, subsiding another force to France under the command of the earl of Huntingdon.

Having settled his business with the Council, Henry returned to Calais at the end of June 1439 to prepare for the latest peace conference. In a concession to the elderly churchman, the meeting was to take place under his jurisdiction in Oye, around seven miles east of Calais. No expense was spared by the cardinal, who 'outshone all in the splendour of his tents and pavilions'. His timber and canvas tent was around one hundred feet long and lavishly lined with scarlet cloth, a nod to his rank within the Church. The venue was capable of holding three hundred people, and had separate sections for the pantry, buttery, wine cellar and kitchen, with the centrepiece being the large central hall furnished with the ornate furniture and gold plate the cardinal had brought with him from England.[25] There were permanent manor houses less opulent than Henry Beaufort's temporary residence.

After a feast on 2 July to mark St Swithun's Day, the patron saint of Henry's diocese, the conference commenced on 10 July with a lengthy oration by the archbishop of York praising the efforts of the cardinal and duchess in promoting peace over war. In deference to his

age and rank, Henry was seated at one end of the pavilion between Isobel and her niece, the princess of Navarre. When he rose to speak, his assembled audience were afforded a glimpse of his glorious throne, extravagantly bedecked with cloth of gold. Henry boldly declared that the ongoing conflict had caused enough bloodshed in Christendom, and an end to hostilities must be sought lest both kingdoms destroy one another. It was a impassioned plea, but Henry was left utterly dismayed with how the talks unfolded.

From the outset, the English and French envoys were at odds, with Charles VII's ambassadors adamant that for any truce to be established Henry VI had to forfeit his claim to the French throne and surrender any lands he controlled in Maine, Anjou and Normandy. Their English counterparts, meanwhile, had been instructed before departure that if they were unable to secure reasonable terms through their own efforts,

> rather thanne the thing falle to rupture, the said ambassatours shall reporte hem in this matier to my Lord the Cardinal to whom the Kyng hath opened and declared al his entent in this matier.[26]

It seems the king had entrusted his uncle with secret instructions, the clearest indication yet of the intimacy between two men almost fifty years apart in age. Sure enough, the exasperated ambassadors did eventually refer the matter to Cardinal Beaufort, who held several private meetings with Duchess Isabel to bemoan the lack of progress. A new proposal was mooted; a temporary peace of fifteen years, with no cession of lands from the English, provided King Henry surrendered the title king of France during the interim.

The cardinal required the assent of king and council before he could consent to such terms, and on 29 July the negotiations were suspended to allow the English envoys to return to London. Henry took the opportunity to visit Hammes on 6 August, where he stayed for several days before praying at the shrine of St Gertrude one week later and collecting some earth from the grave.[27] The mini-pilgrimage

perhaps served as a brief respite from the stress of the previous month, although, looking ahead, he must have known his great-nephew would reject the terms put to him.

Henry VI had been styled king of France since he was nine months old, and although committed to securing true peace with his French royal uncle, was unwilling to do so at the expense of his title. To surrender his claim, Henry justifiably declared, would 'no onely hurt the opinion of his right and claime, but also hurt his name, his fame and reputacyon in the worlde'. The envoys returned to Calais on 9 September to convey his decision to the weary cardinal, and together they travelled to the site of the conference two days later, only to find the French nowhere to be seen. Other than signing an agreement with Isabel to reopen the trading routes with Burgundy, the summit had reached an anticlimactic end for the cardinal, and thoughts turned to his sombre return to England. Far from being a mediator of peace, Henry Beaufort, through no real fault of his own, had failed in his mission. When he departed from Calais in the middle of September 1439, he left France, and the European mainland, for the final time. By 5 October, he was back at his palace in Southwark, and personally debriefed the king at Windsor four days later.[28]

The collapse of the peace talks ensured a fresh English army was required for combat in the new year, and in December 1439 Somerset was indented to cross to Normandy with a force of 100 men-at-arms and 2,000 archers. His mission was simple, to 'governe there the Kynges peple and lands' and to help maintain 'the Kynges right and title'. Although it was precisely the opportunity Somerset sought to prove himself a capable commander in the mould of his younger brother Edmund, the financially beleaguered earl was forced to petition the king to be paid for his services prior to departure, rather than afterwards. As the king's 'humble man', Somerset bemoaned the 'grete charges that he hath borne late', referring to the crippling cost of his ransom. The king willingly obliged.[29] The cardinal, meanwhile, remained eager to secure the office of lieutenant for his nephew and stepped in with a timely loan of 10,000 marks to ensure the expedition went ahead as planned. With the financial arrangements

sorted, Somerset's force was expected to be ready to embark from Poole in mid-January, with the earl presumably based across the harbour at Corfe.

As preparations for his departure gathered pace throughout the Christmas period, with men, boats, weapons and supplies procured from across the kingdom, on 31 December, Somerset received the devastating news that his fifty-four-year-old mother Margaret, from whom he had been separated for most of his adult life, had passed away in Bermondsey Abbey.[30] Her body was interred in the recently rebuilt St Michael's Chapel in Canterbury, and laid to rest alongside the remains of her two husbands, John Beaufort, earl of Somerset, and Thomas, duke of Clarence.

The 1430s had been a tumultuous decade for the Beauforts, beginning with the demise of Thomas, taking in the personal strife of the two Joans, and ending with John's release, Edmund's heroics and Margaret's death. Now the elderly cardinal of England was showing signs of growing fatigue after a lifetime of intense service to the crown and he was particularly dejected at his failure to secure a favourable outcome in the negotiations at Arras in 1435 and Oye in 1439. The stage was set for a final confrontation with Gloucester, the outcome of which would determine the long-term future of the family.

So Great a Disgrace
1440–1444

The failure of Cardinal Beaufort to conclude peace with France in the summer of 1439 encouraged the duke of Gloucester to launch another attack on his uncle in the following January. Gloucester, who stubbornly favoured prolonging the war, had vociferously opposed the peace process from the outset, becoming particularly incensed about the secret instructions entrusted to the cardinal by the king.

Unlike in 1426 and 1432, Henry did not vigorously defend his actions, and instead remained impassive to the duke's allegations. Approaching his sixty-fifth year, it's likely he no longer possessed the boundless energy, or inclination, to challenge his vitriolic nephew in writing nor in person. The wily churchman may even have determined that the best defence was no defence at all, refusing to dignify Gloucester with a response.

The scope of the duke's attack, submitted in writing to the king and covering more than twenty separate items, was extraordinary; he accused his uncle of greed and nepotism, declaring that the cardinal's actions over the previous two decades were self-serving and detrimental to the good of the realm. Rather than working to advance crown interests, Gloucester believed the cardinal only sought to enhance the prospects of his Beaufort nephews. He also raised older, resolved issues in a concerted attempt to add substance to his allegations, reminding the king how Henry had presumptuously accepted the cardinalate in 1417 without receiving royal permission, as well as retaining his bishopric after his eventual elevation in 1426 and unlawfully entering England as papal legate three years later. That the cardinal had already received pardons for these offences was conveniently overlooked.

Gloucester also charged his wealthy uncle with defrauding the king

by advancing large sums of money in return for customs duties and jewels that outweighed the amount originally lent. In the case of Chirk, it was even claimed land had been unfairly swindled from the king. Gloucester then attempted to raise public indignation against the cardinal for masterminding the forthcoming release of Charles, duke of Orléans, after twenty-five years' imprisonment. Beaufort had convinced the king that releasing the Frenchman was a political necessity to either provoke a peace treaty through a gesture of goodwill, or to unleash a potential agitator back into Charles VII's court.

It was a devastating list, which makes the lack of public defence from the cardinal all the more puzzling. If Henry Beaufort's refusal to respond was a considered tactic, however, then it worked. Rather than bringing about his uncle's downfall, Gloucester again lacked sufficient influence to complete the job. There is no evidence of the Council's deliberations on the matter, if any existed, but it appears they quickly sidestepped the duke's complaints.[1]

As the sibling earls of Somerset and Dorset entered the final stages of preparation for another French campaign, both men received a boost to their finances through grants in early 1440, connected to the recent death of their mother Margaret. On 29 January, Dorset was granted his mother's life annuity of 500 marks, while on 19 February, Somerset formally inherited all the manors and lands that descended to him after the duchess's death.[2]

Orders were dispatched on 8 and 11 February for the mustering of Somerset's army, and by the beginning of Lent the earl was back in France as the senior English commander on the Continent. His uncle had failed to secure the office of lieutenant for Somerset before his departure, but nevertheless he was given temporary powers to receive oaths of fidelity from any towns and castles he encountered, to make truces with enemy commanders, to appoint his own captains and officials, and to grant minor lands to deserving parties. He retained these rights until Richard of York, supported by Gloucester, was appointed lieutenant in July 1440. This frustrated Beaufort hopes for

the post and meant missing out on wages of £20,000 a year. If Gloucester had been unable to bring about the cardinal's defeat before parliament, then equally so, the cardinal had been unable to impose his own choice as lieutenant against the duke's preference.

Somerset's tenure in Normandy was not uneventful. His force of just over 2,000 men marched with purpose towards Picardy, where they laid siege to the town of Folleville. It was during this attack that an unnamed favourite of Somerset's was killed, triggering the implacable earl to swear 'a great oath that he would not march away until he should have conquered the castle, and reduced all within to his power'. He did just that; Folleville was mercilessly bombarded until it capitulated, and the surviving inhabitants were forced into paying the earl for their lives. Somerset ordered the castle repaired before the English continued their march on to Lihons, in the centre of which stood a minor fort next to a church into which the frightened citizens fled to seek refuge.

According to the Burgundian Monstrelet, Somerset commanded them to open the doors and surrender, otherwise he would have them removed by force. When those in the church, numbering 300 and including women and children, refused to comply, the church was torched and those inside were consumed by the flames until their bodies were 'pitilessly destroyed'. The distraught garrison, watching the brutal events from the nearby fort, lost their nerve and surrendered. Somerset wasn't done; his men led devastating raids into the surrounding countryside, stealing from and harassing the locals before seizing the town of Harbonnières and forcing the lord to ransom himself for a thousand golden *saluts*. After ten days' recuperation at Lihons, a satisfied Somerset returned to Rouen, replenishing the Folleville garrison on the way.[3]

In July 1440, as news reached the camp that York had been appointed lieutenant, Somerset, with his brother Dorset, cousin Fauconberg and Lord Talbot, turned his attention to recapturing Harfleur. The Beauforts' uncle Exeter had captured the fortress in 1415, and although the French had retaken possession in 1435, the

brothers were determined to emulate their esteemed kinsman. Family honour, and their own reputation, was at stake, but the Beauforts experienced many of the same problems as Exeter had a generation earlier because Harfleur was well-fortified and garrisoned with a force of around 400 men under the capable command of another set of brothers, John and Robert d'Estouteville.

Probably acting partly on the advice of his more experienced colleagues, Somerset commanded several protective ditches to be dug between his men and the castle walls while numerous siege engines were employed to bombard the town gates from afar. Four exhausting months elapsed before a French relief force under the command of the counts of Eu and Dunois arrived in the region to rescue their countrymen. Their strategy was to initiate a pincer attack on the English, with separate detachments advancing from three different directions. Talbot's men came under attack first, although farcically, the French pontoons were too short to span the wide ditches, giving English archers ample time to pick off their enemy. Eu changed tact and ordered an assault by sea, but again found the English forces well defended against their landing.

With little option but to retreat, Eu withdrew north to Montivilliers, from where he personally challenged Somerset to a duel to settle the issue. Regardless of John Beaufort's often questionable judgement, he wasn't a fool. Harfleur, ravaged with famine and disease, could not hold out indefinitely and there was little need to risk the entire costly operation in a one-on-one swordfight. Sure enough, Harfleur capitulated in late October, and the town gates were opened once more to Beaufort conquerors.[4]

Both men returned to England with their martial reputations enhanced, although Somerset's activities at Lihons were questionable and hint at a particularly ruthless, even cruel, aspect to his character. Provided Monstrelet's account is accurate, had captivity in France hardened the spirit of the earl, compelling him to act with far greater savagery than his contemporaries? Dorset, meanwhile, in recognition of his 'good service', was granted an inn with 'divers cottages, cellars,

and gardens called Oldecaleys' on 14 February 1441, a useful property in the St Nicholas parish of Calais that formerly belonged to the duke of Bedford.[5]

If the cardinal was buoyed by news of his nephews' capture of Harfleur, his joy was short-lived, for news reached him that on 13 November 1440 his sister Joan had died. The dowager countess of Westmorland had spent the last two years of her life in the palatial manor of Howden, an ecclesiastic property twenty miles south-east of York which had come into the possession of her son Robert Neville after his translation to the bishopric of Durham in early 1438.[6] The manor, in the shadow of a fine collegiate church, had long been used as a stopping point for successive bishops on the route to and from London, and having belonged to the former chancellor Thomas Langley prior to Bishop Neville, was a comfortable residence for Joan to spend the twilight of her life.

Joan's will, witnessed at Howden seven months before her death, focused on a number of monasteries in the north while commendably providing for members of her household and poor tenants on her farms. Her children were not overlooked, of course; she left a Psalter to her sons, probably inherited from her own mother, and also bequeathed to them 'a gold ring with which I was sworn in holy wise to God'. She may have lived and died a northern countess, with a tomb already prepared for her alongside her husband in the collegiate church in Staindrop, within walking distance of her erstwhile home at Raby, but Joan requested to be buried as a dutiful daughter next to her mother in Lincoln Cathedral.[7] Touchingly, their bond was as strong in death as it had been in life.

The tombs of Joan Beaufort and Katherine Swynford were originally placed side by side on the south side of Lincoln's presbytery, close to the high altar and with an iron gate. A 1640 drawing by William Dugdale reveals the tombs had brass figures on top, with Joan's noticeably embellished with the Beaufort and Neville arms. Both suffered damage during the English Civil War, and they now lie head to toe.

The death of the most powerful matriarch in the north allowed the bitter twenty-year conflict between her husband's two sets of children to reach a lasting conclusion. The countess's eldest son, Salisbury, agreed to concede a number of lands in County Durham, including Brancepeth and Raby castles, to the Stafford-Nevilles, while on 26 August 1443 Westmorland formally recognised his half-uncle Salisbury's right to hold the remainder of the Neville estates in Yorkshire, Cumberland, Essex, Westmorland, York and London. Salisbury's influence at court far surpassed that of Westmorland, perhaps resulting in such favourable terms, and as a national figure the loss of Durham was of little consequence.[8]

The death of Joan Beaufort must have profoundly affected the cardinal. Unmarried because of his holy orders, Henry had outlived both his parents and all his siblings. Even though his two surviving nephews had achieved significant success in Normandy, he nonetheless maintained a low profile over the next twelve months, even when the scandalous activities of Eleanor Cobham threatened to ruin her husband Gloucester in the summer of 1441.

The duchess was accused of not only consulting astrologers who predicted the king's death (a treasonable offence), but also of procuring several poisonous potions she intended to use on King Henry. Eleanor's supposed motive was clear; should the king die without an heir, the crown would pass to Gloucester, making her queen in the process.

The duchess was examined in the presence of the cardinal and council at the end of July, although Henry took a back seat to the archbishop of Canterbury. He was also noticeably absent from her sentencing in October when Eleanor was ordered to do public penance through the streets of London before perpetual imprisonment. Her astrologers were unceremoniously executed. Gloucester had been humiliated by the shaming of his wife, and although a divorce was forcibly arranged to save face he remained politically discredited for the rest of his life.

There is no evidence of the cardinal's involvement in the duchess's

downfall as revenge against his nemesis, though Edward Hall's later assertion that 'divers secret attempts were advanced forward' to bring about the duke's ruin suggests rumours of a conspiracy.[9] Whatever the level of Beaufort's participation, if any, Eleanor Cobham condemned herself through her own foolish, indiscreet actions. She remained in captivity until her death a decade later. The bitter rivalry between uncle and nephew had taken yet another unexpected turn.

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By the autumn of 1442, the Council had grown increasingly concerned by Charles VII's plans to invade Guienne, a disquieting development they were ill equipped to deal with. Not for the first time, the only Englishman with the financial clout to fund an armed defence was Cardinal Beaufort. Although he had gradually retreated from frontline politics since 1439, Henry was willing to assist, but his cooperation came at a price – command of the army was to be given to his nephew, Somerset. The king accepted his great-uncle's condition, and declared in a letter to Bordeaux on 21 September 1442 'we have appointed our cousin of Somerset and with hym right a noble puissance of men of werre to passe into our said duchie'. Hoping to raise spirits, the king added that Somerset 'with Goddes mercy shal be there in al possible haste'.[10]

Despite the king's pledge, John Beaufort tarried in England throughout the winter, prompting Henry VI to write to the earl on 27 February 1443, firstly to enquire after his welfare, and secondly to stress the urgency of his departure.[11] Several council meetings throughout the spring considered how the campaign should be handled, and whether the army should be dispatched to Guienne or Normandy, only one of which could be afforded. Somerset, for his part, declared he planned to adopt an offensive strategy against the French, a daring variation from previous tactics. The English were losing ground to the French in every aspect, and desperately needed a major victory on the battlefield to claw back the advantage, another Agincourt or Verneuil.

Somerset also demanded full control over the army, with authority to dictate the military operation and the right to retain any towns he captured for himself and his family. The Council, beholden to the cardinal's funding and nervous of Charles's advance, could only acquiesce. There was a concern, however, that such autonomy would upset the duke of York, so on 30 March a letter was dispatched to the lieutenant-general advising that Somerset's mission was not intended 'to be prejudiciall to the power before hande given' to the duke. Somerset wasn't done, however. He also secured a general pardon from the king, with the promise that in the event of his death abroad, his countess would be permitted to raise their unborn child unmolested, having 'more tenderness thanne any other creature'.

The earl even had the temerity to ask the cash-strapped king for lands worth 1,000 marks a year, which the Council countered with the earldom of Kendal and its associated lands worth 600 marks a year. Lastly, it was announced that, due to the blood kinship between Somerset and the king, he was to be raised to a duke and, again at his request, given precedence over the duke of Norfolk. He was formally invested by the king on 23 April, St George's Day, at Windsor Castle, presumably before his cardinal uncle and brother Edmund, who almost certainly would have been present. It may have seemed to many that what the Beauforts wanted, the Beauforts got.[12]

The beleaguered York could only observe events from afar with rising indignation, as his wife Cecily's cousin received men and money that he, as lieutenant-general, was clearly lacking. To compound matters, the terms of Somerset's indenture stated that should his wages fall into arrears, as had happened to York, then he was under no obligation to remain in France and was free to return to England at his own discretion. York, meanwhile, was forced into further debt to pay his men, while his own wages were now redirected to Somerset. Perhaps the biggest insult to the duke, and the most significant concession to John Beaufort, was that the latter was given the title 'Lieutenant and Captain General of our Duchie of Guienne and of our Reaume of France'. Almost as an afterthought, York was asked by the king to 'take patiens and forbere him for a tyme'.

That Henry VI intended to use Somerset as a defensive shield 'betwixt him and adversarie' hardly placated Richard. It was almost certainly the intention of the Beauforts to position John as an obvious alternative to York. Somerset had not earned the right to such powers or advancement, and his elevation was unquestionably due to the cardinal's timely loans, which amounted to £20,000 for the first six months' wages.[13] Such underhanded tactics only served to create a long-lasting enmity between the York and Beaufort factions, fuelling a rivalry that would ultimately lead to the downfall of both families.

From the outset, the 1443 expedition had little to do with what was best for England and more to do with advancing Beaufort prospects across the Channel. The entire campaign was a gamble, for Somerset didn't have the military experience or the personal magnetism to oversee such a sizable mission, the last large-scale invasion of France during the Hundred Years War. It was also an uncharacteristic risk by the pragmatic cardinal, and wholly at odds with the peace policy he had passionately pursued for the past decade. One can only assume that, as he headed towards the last few years of his life, Henry deduced this was the last opportunity to establish a permanent Beaufort interest in northern France.

Somerset hardly proved reliable, however. He failed to appear for the planned muster on 17 June, prompting the king to furiously censure his cousin on 9 July for his long-delayed departure, a tardiness that was costing the royal exchequer £500 a day to keep the loitering soldiers fed and watered. King Henry's words were scathing; he 'marvailleth gretly and nought withoute cause the long abood of his said cousin on this side the sea', and warned if Somerset didn't gather his troops ready for departure soon it would be deemed suspicious.[14]

The chastised duke duly assembled his troops at Portsmouth a week later, and finally departed from England with an army numbering 600 men-at-arms and 3,949 archers. Again, he deviated from the Council's instructions, and rather than heading for Bordeaux to defend Guienne landed in Cherbourg, Normandy, in early August.

Heading south to Avranches and Mortain, Somerset invaded Anjou, which was laid to 'great waste with fire and sword'. Rather foolishly, however, the duke then advanced north-west and captured La Guerche, just inside the Breton border, which he then had the audacity to ransom back to Duke Francis, a supposed ally of England. Although Somerset profited handsomely from the transaction, the Anglo-Breton relationship took a severe pounding, prompting the king to 'comaundeth straitely' his cousin to cease acting 'contrarie to the peas' and to make restitution to Francis.[15] Somerset was becoming a loose cannon.

He advanced south after the Breton incident until he reached Pouancé, where he remained for two months while his men pillaged the surrounding area for food and supplies. Beaumont-le-Vicomte fell in November before Somerset disbanded his army in December, two months before the agreed date. By January 1444 he was back in England, having promised a lot but delivered little.[16] The duke's underwhelming expedition had been a costly exercise for the king, even accounting for the cardinal's loans, and represented a crucial waste of resources in a vain attempt to appease Somerset's lofty dynastic ambitions in northern France. The enemy had not been engaged in battle, reducing the campaign to a glorified raid, and all things considered, the entire operation had been a shambles from the outset.

John Beaufort returned to England a political and military embarrassment. It wasn't quite that Somerset had *lost* anything, but more that he had sworn to accomplish great things and failed miserably to live up to his word. He had squandered a colossal amount of the king's money attempting to further his own interests in Anjou and Maine, a desperate attempt, no doubt, to recoup some of the crippling ransom he had paid for his freedom. Predictably, the king and council were infuriated by his actions both before and during the campaign, and the cardinal no longer possessed the influence to protect his nephew from any recriminations. Somerset was shunned at court and retreated to his Dorset estates, where on 27 May 1444 he unexpectedly died. Even in death, he proved controversial.

There is a suggestion in the *Croyland Chronicle*, which it must be noted was written from the confines of an abbey hostile to the duke, that Somerset committed suicide upon discovering he was to be tried for treason, an unthinkable sin to the medieval mind that would condemn his soul to an eternity in Hell. The account states:

> The noble heart of a man of such high rank upon hearing this most unhappy news, was moved to extreme indignation; and being unable to bear the stain of so great a disgrace, he accelerated his death by putting an end to his existence, it is generally said.[17]

The last few words are key, suggesting the writer was only reporting rumour rather than fact. The account also mentions how Somerset preferred to 'cut short his sorrow, rather than pass a life of misery, labouring under so disgraceful a charge'. Was the death of Somerset truly at his own hand? There is no factual evidence to support this, but equally, it can't be comprehensively ruled out. The *Brut Chronicle* only notes the duke died 'anon after Easter', passing away 'at a Maner of his owne in the west cuntre', possibly Corfe Castle.[18]

Illness can't be discounted. Somerset was only around forty years old at the time of his death, a similar age to his father when the 1st Earl died in 1410, but was apparently unwell early in 1443 when the king enquired after his welfare. The failure of his expedition, and his subsequent expulsion from court, must have been a stressful period, and it's not inconceivable such mental strain may have brought on a sudden physical illness. The added fact that he died intestate suggests death took the duke by surprise, something that does not point to death by his own hand.

Whether suicide or not, Somerset's death came just four days before his only child's first birthday. In between his two French campaigns of 1440 and 1443, Beaufort married a widow named Margaret Beauchamp, the sole heiress of Sir John Beauchamp of Bletsoe, Bedfordshire. It wasn't an auspicious match for Somerset, a great-grandson of Edward III, but considering his age and lack of

viable alternatives, he couldn't be more selective in his choice of bride. Perhaps the duke jealously regarded his brother Edmund's own Beauchamp wife, Eleanor, a daughter of the 13th Earl of Warwick.

Margaret had previously been married to Sir Oliver St John, with whom she had a sizable brood of children. She was clearly fertile, and presumably considered ideal for providing Somerset with a Beaufort heir, if not much else. The couple's only child, named Margaret after her mother and paternal grandmother, was born on 31 May 1443, perhaps partly the reason for Somerset's reluctance to depart for France that spring. Although John died before he could sire a son to continue the Beaufort legacy, in time, little Margaret became the most famous person to bear the family name.

Somerset did have another daughter, albeit one born out of wedlock while he was a prisoner in France. The details surrounding the birth of Tacyn, or Tacine, are unclear, but it is likely she arrived in England with her father when he was released in 1438. One of the many conditions of Somerset departing for France in 1443 had been the granting of letters of denizenship for his foreign-born daughter, conferring upon her the rights of a native-born Englishwoman, including that of holding land, granted by the king on 20 June.[19] It is unclear if she used the surname Beaufort or Somerset, but within three years of her father's death, she made a respectable marriage to Reginald Grey, 7th Baron Grey de Wilton.

It is likely Somerset also had a bastard son, for there is reference to 'John, bastard of Somerset' in the 1447 will of Cardinal Beaufort. He was well provided for; the churchman bequeathed £4,000 and some vessels of silver.[20] There is no later reference to the younger John, and presumably he died prior to the Wars of the Roses when his royal blood, albeit tainted by illegitimacy, may have proved to be a contentious issue.

John Beaufort, 1st Duke of Somerset, was discreetly laid to rest in Wimborne Minster, a Benedictine monastery dating from the Saxon period and dedicated to the eighth-century abbess, St Cuthburg. The Minster had been re-founded by Edward the Confessor in 1066 and

much of the structure at the time of Somerset's interment dated from the twelfth century. The duke's tomb, located on the south side of the chancel and near the high altar, was built using local Purbeck marble, with several quatrefoils on the base once bearing his ancestors' heraldic shields. Somerset himself was depicted in full plate armour with a ducal coronet on his helmet, while around his neck was a Lancastrian 'SS' collar. On his left-hand side was a sword, once splendidly studded with precious stones, and prominent below his left knee was the Garter. Alongside the duke was an effigy of his wife, Margaret Beauchamp, who remarried and survived until June 1482. The pair were depicted holding hands, suggesting the effigies were not constructed until the time of the duchess's own death, and perhaps even commissioned by their flourishing daughter.

Margaret Beaufort did not forget about her father, even though he passed away before she was old enough to remember him. Able to take advantage of her exalted status as the king's mother, Margaret secured a licence on 1 March 1496 to found a chantry chapel of one chaplain in the 'collegiate church of Wymburne', to be named the chantry of the Blessed Jesus and St Mary the Virgin. The chapel was to be endowed to the value of £10 a year, but for unknown reasons wasn't completed until 1511, two years after her own death.[21] Lady Margaret's desire to ensure the chantry was finished was evident in her will, when she reiterated her desire to 'establishe and founde a perpetuall chauntery of oon preest in the college of Wymborn', imploring her executors to act 'assone as they conveniently maye'.[22] She may not have known her father, but it was clearly important to Margaret that his memory, and soul, was suitably commemorated.

Somerset's death was an inglorious end to a life of captivity, botched military campaigns and failed reintegration back into English aristocratic society. His younger brother Edmund, overshadowed somewhat since John's release by virtue of age rather than merit, could now add the earldom of Somerset to his existing titles, and return to his former role as head of the secular branch of the family. That family name had become tarnished, however, and the most powerful man in the kingdom was no longer the semi-retired cardinal

of England. In fact, it wasn't even the duke of Gloucester. A new political force was in the ascendant, and his name was William de la Pole, earl of Suffolk.

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In the aftermath of Somerset's underwhelming campaign, another attempt was made at securing peace with Charles VII, with the English embassy led for the first time by Suffolk, rather than Cardinal Beaufort. The ceeding of English lands and Henry VI's insistence on retaining his French title remained significant stumbling blocks, but a marriage between the English king and a French princess was proposed as a compromise. The choice of bride was Margaret, the fifteen-year-old daughter of René, duke of Anjou and titular king of Sicily, Naples, Hungary and Jerusalem. It was an impressive array of titles but, in truth, René held little actual land and had limited funds; the appeal of Margaret stemmed solely from the fact she was a niece by marriage of Charles VII and, for King Henry anyway, represented peace. Ironically, she would become one of England's most divisive medieval figures.

The negotiations were tough and although Margaret was unable to bring a dowry to the marriage, Suffolk was forced to discuss the possibility of transferring English-held territory in Maine and Anjou to René, lands the Beauforts had long endeavoured to bring under their control. There was little the cardinal or Edmund Beaufort could do, exempt as they were from the secretive discussions.

Suffolk already had dealings with the Beauforts when he took swift advantage of Somerset's death by obtaining the rights to the many of the duke's lands. On 8 June 1444, as young Margaret Beaufort was 'within age and in the king's keeping', Suffolk was granted 'the keeping of all the lands and possessions late of the duke', having also secured her marital rights only four days after her father's death. The latter warrant, issued on the last day of May, considered 'the notable services that our Cousin therl of Suffolk hath doon unto us' and therefore granted to him 'warde and marriage of the said Margarete', a

significant coup.[23] Six years elapsed before Suffolk sought papal dispensation in August 1450 to marry Margaret, then just over seven years old, to his son John, although the earl's death a few months later voided the union. Margaret's wardship was eventually regranted on 24 March 1453 to the king's 'uterine brothers', Edmund de Hadham and Jasper de Hatfield, better known as the Tudors, and she was married to the former two years later.[24]

As his brother's senior living male heir, Edmund Beaufort presumably expected to claim most of the lands that had belonged to John, at least while his niece remained a minor. The problem for Dorset was many of his brother's grants, Corfe Castle being a notable exception, had not been granted in tail male and therefore passed back into the king's hands to be redistributed as the sovereign deemed appropriate. Furthermore, on 17 October 1442, John had been permitted to grant a third party lands worth up to £1,000 a year, and for them to be granted back to both John and his wife Margaret to hold jointly.[25] It was not unlike the tactic taken by Ralph Neville and Joan Beaufort some forty years earlier, albeit on a smaller scale, and ensured the lands passed to his wife after his death, and not to his nearest male relative, namely Edmund. Among his many conditions for the 1443 expedition, Somerset also requested the Council appoint him, in his brother's place, governor of Maine. Did such actions create enmity between the siblings? Without access to personal communication between the pair it is difficult to say with any certainty, but Edmund was unusually inconspicuous during Somerset's final campaign, having also evaded any apparent responsibility for the operation.

The Beauforts had long been on the receiving end of favouritism from the king, but their privileged position had been usurped in recent months by Suffolk. With Edmund Beaufort's prospective inheritance diminished, his brothers dead and his aged uncle effectively in retirement and preparing to meet his maker, Edmund's prospects were decidedly uncertain. It was clear he had his work cut out if he was to maintain the family's spot at the top table of English politics, a burden that he alone had to shoulder.

The Death of a Cardinal
1445–1447

Since Henry V's untimely death in 1422, English politics had been bitterly polarised between the Beaufort and Gloucester factions, with each party taking turns in the ascendancy. By 1445, however, power had gradually shifted away from the old order and into the hands of a new, ambitious generation of magnates eager to exert their newfound influence on a compliant king, lacking his father's autocratic disposition.

The most dynamic member of this emergent breed of royal advisors was William de la Pole, 4th Earl of Suffolk, who as Steward of the King's Household was well placed to enjoy significant private access to the young sovereign as the latter entered adulthood. The de la Poles had established their position at court through decades of commendable service to the crown, not unlike the Beauforts, with William's grandfather Michael de la Pole rising as high as chancellor under Richard II.

Despite this association with the fallen king, the family quickly proved loyal to the House of Lancaster, with varying consequences; William's father and brother, both named Michael, sailed to France in 1415, with the elder Michael, 2nd Earl, dying at the siege of Harfleur and the younger Michael, 3rd Earl, slain a few weeks later at Agincourt. William de la Pole had therefore become earl before he was twenty-two years old, and didn't waste the unexpected opportunity. He continued to fight in France until his return to England in 1434 when he established his position on the Council alongside Cardinal Beaufort, cousin of his countess, Alice Chaucer. Suffolk further ingratiated himself with the king by overseeing the foundation of Henry's royal colleges at Cambridge and Eton, and was personally handed the assignment of arranging the king's marriage in

1444, for which he was elevated to a marquis.

Above all, however, it was Suffolk who was tasked with securing peace with France, a thankless task that exposed the marquis to scathing criticism, particularly when news emerged about the cession of Maine and Anjou in exchange for a paltry eighteen-month truce and a French marriage that brought no dowry to the English. With the king above reproach, culpability for such poor terms lay with Suffolk. The truth was that Henry had all but rolled over for his French uncle, stubbornly focused on peace at any cost. It was the type of irresponsible and naïve kingship that would later typify the doomed reign of Henry VI.

For Edmund Beaufort, the truce was a development that caused concern, particularly once he discovered the intended cession of Maine and Anjou, of which he still served as governor. Even accounting for the death of his brother, the earl of Dorset did not have a substantial landed estate, and the anticipated loss of his French interests was deeply frustrating. Although raised to the marquisate in June 1443, on 1 December that year he was specifically granted an annuity of £224 6*s* 8*d* from the issues of Carmarthen and Cardigan in South Wales, 'in consideration of his being a younger brother and inheriting nothing by the death of his ancestors'. This lack of inheritance, exacerbated by the dissolution of John Beaufort's estate after his death in May 1444, probably explained another grant made to Dorset on 4 October 1444 when the king gave him the Somerset manors of Stoke-sub-Hamdon, Curry Mallet, Stratton-on-the-Fosse, Farrington Gurney, Welton, Englishcombe, Milton Falconberg, Midsomer Norton, Widcombe, Laverton, West Harptree and Shepton Mallet, along with Ryme Manor in Dorset. The lands, which had belonged to Sir John Tiptoft, were valued at £417 14*s* a year and helped establish Beaufort in the south-west.[1] Even so, Dorset was not a major landowner, and would clearly question handing over his estates in Maine and Anjou. Suffolk recognised this, and in desperate need of allies, propositioned his fellow marquis.

The duke of York's tenure as Lieutenant-General in France expired

at the end of 1445, although there was an expectation on York's part it would be renewed. Since Gloucester's semi-retirement from politics, York was now recognised as the most senior royal still in active military service and had firmly established himself in Rouen since being permanently appointed to the office in 1440. It was a surprise, therefore when on 24 December 1446, Edmund Beaufort was appointed Lieutenant for three years by Suffolk, terminating York's governance in the process.[2] It was clearly an attempt to pacify Dorset for the impending loss of his estates by handing him the most prestigious military post in France. For the second time in only three years, York was shunted to one side to appease the Beauforts.

Unfortunately for Dorset, by the time he assumed the lieutenancy, once highly sought after for his brother Somerset, it was a poisoned chalice. The English war effort was on its last legs, and a total French victory was an inevitability if lasting peace could not be negotiated. For Cardinal Beaufort, however, in the last months of his momentous life, it must surely have brought a brief smile to his aged face. He had always intended one of his nephews to replace the duke of Bedford as the leading English commander in France, to personally uphold the hard-fought victories of Edward III and Henry V and enhance the Beaufort legacy. The Cardinal of England would die knowing Edmund Beaufort, the most robust and capable of his brother's sons, was now in place as the king's man in France. He wouldn't live to see the consequences of his nephew's governance.

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It is not known what effect John Beaufort's disastrous 1443 expedition to Normandy had on his uncle, who had gambled on his nephew, and lost. It is perhaps telling that there is no mention of John in the cardinal's will, with no provisions made to even pray for his soul. Cardinal Beaufort's presence at court significantly diminished as he approached his seventieth birthday and he is not recorded attending council meetings past the spring of 1444. He also appears to have stayed away from London after this, only occasionally venturing to his

palaces in Southwark and Esher. His preferred residences were the episcopal palaces at Wolvesey and Farnham, and in the precinct of Christ Church, Canterbury. He had outlived most of his family, not to mention many of his contemporaries, and with a new political force in the ascendancy, satisfied himself settling his affairs and spending some of his carefully accumulated wealth.

Although Canterbury was not part of his diocese, Henry had grown fond of staying in a former pilgrim hostel known as Meister Omers, about thirty metres from the east end of the church and where he spent the autumn and winter of 1445. Arriving on the afternoon of 14 October,[3] Henry soon ordered the thirteenth century building to be pulled down and rebuilt to his own specifications. The cardinal's new private quarters featured their own garderobe, fireplace and chapel, with convenient access to a spacious hall containing a couple of elaborately designed oriel windows. It may not have been as grand as some of his other bishopric residences, but it was comfortable enough for the old man to spend Christmas, when he ordered his throne to be brought from Winchester.[4] In fact, his renovation of Meister Omers was so thorough the premises became known for a period as *Le Cardynallysplace.*[5] The property not only allowed the cardinal to communicate easier with his nephew in France, but also provided access to the tombs of his brothers John Beaufort and Henry IV in the cathedral. Did visiting the resting places of his siblings bring the aged cardinal comfort as he prepared for his own death?

Cardinal Beaufort left Canterbury for the final time towards the end of 1446, and after a brief stop in Southwark returned to Wolvesey Castle in Winchester to spend his final days. As it was the administrative centre of his diocese, Henry spent much of the early 1440s bringing many of the castle's original amenities up to date. The Great East Hall roof was replaced at a cost of £300, with an impressive rectangular window inserted into the northern end of the hall. The pantry and north cloister walk were also rebuilt, while the chapel, standing to the south-east of the West Hall, was reconstructed atop its Norman foundations.[6]

Bishop's Waltham Palace also received attention; an extra story was added to the west tower as early as 1406, while the chapel was rebuilt between 1416 and 1427. Henry's most extensive building programme occurred between 1437 and 1441, when he enlarged the palace by erecting new privy chambers in the south-western tower and constructing a gatehouse on the north side. For increased comfort, all passages were retiled and the windows reglazed, while the bishop's garden was overhauled. Henry also pledged money towards the construction of a chantry chapel in the cloister of Winchester College, known as Fromond's Chantry after its original founder. An effigy of the cardinal was placed above the altar to commemorate his contribution, while his coat of arms and image are still displayed on ceiling bosses.

The cardinal was keen to leave a lasting legacy in a diocese he had largely neglected in favour of national and international interests. This was never more evident than in his efforts to re-found the Hospital of St Cross in Winchester, an 'alms house of noble poverty' originally built by Bishop Henry of Blois in 1136. The cardinal expanded the existing almshouses to provide additional accommodation for thirty-five brethren, with three sisters and two chaplains. He stipulated they were to be unmarried, of gentle birth, and needy either due to an accident or disability, with many of the first brothers former servants of the cardinal, a last generous act from a grateful master. The brethren were provided with a livery of a deep red colour with the cardinal's hat embroidered on the chest, and were expected to pray daily for the soul of Henry as well as the king and queen.

The construction undertaken at St Cross was extensive, encompassing the private chambers of the brethren, the Great Hall, the main gatehouse and the chapel, and ensured the living conditions were comfortable and warm. Reminders of the hospital's chief benefactor were omnipresent; the cardinal's Beaufort coat of arms was depicted on the mullioned windows in the hall, as well as carved onto bosses throughout the same room. The arms were also found on the northern side of the elegant gatehouse tower, above which stood a weathered statue of the cardinal, once resplendent in his red hat and

kneeling subserviently to another statue that is no longer present. Any visitor to the hospital was left in no doubt as to who was responsible for the work therein. Like many Beaufort schemes, however, his plan was soon beset by difficulties. In this case, the cardinal failed to ensure there were enough endowments provided for the hospital's upkeep, and it operated at a loss for many years after his death.[7]

Henry was at Wolvesey in early 1447 when news reached him of Gloucester's sudden death in Bury St Edmund's, only a few days after the duke's arrest for treason. It seems unlikely the cardinal shed any tears for his troublesome nephew, with whom he had repeatedly clashed for more than twenty years. Gloucester's downfall had begun with the imprisonment of his duchess in 1441, and was hastened by his obstinate adherence to prolonging the French war, contrary to the prevailing political opinion spearheaded by Suffolk and the king. On 18 February 1447, shortly after arriving in Bury for parliament, Gloucester was arrested in the presence of Edmund Beaufort, who must have taken great joy in witnessing the bewildered reaction of his uncle's enemy. Any charges were almost certainly dubious, for Gloucester, although heir presumptive to the throne since Bedford's death in 1435, had never exhibited any disloyalty to his royal nephew, and certainly wasn't planning to depose the king. He may have been a divisive, stubborn and outspoken character, but his patriotic devotion to the crown was beyond reproach.

The issue for Suffolk was that the duke's popularity among common men could prove troublesome if he used anti-peace rhetoric during the ongoing negotiations with the French, particularly once knowledge of the cession of Maine and Anjou became widespread. It may have been dishonourable, but Gloucester was hardly innocent of similar unscrupulous schemes. In the event, there was to be no show trial. The shock of his arrest caused the duke to fall ill, possibly from a stroke, and he lapsed into a brief coma before passing away on 23 February. There were predictable accusations of foul play, so Gloucester's body was publicly displayed prior to his burial in St Albans.

Henry Beaufort only outlived his great rival by six weeks. The cardinal fell ill just before Easter and summoned all the priests and religious figures in Winchester to his bedside, including the author of the *Croyland Chronicle*. The chronicler, who considered Henry a 'glorious and Catholic man', noted how the cardinal had the Requiem Mass performed in his presence on Easter Sunday, before audibly confirming the contents of his will the following day. On Tuesday morning, 11 April 1447, the seventy-two-year-old Cardinal of England, 'bade farewell to all, and departed this life'.[8] It was a dignified and orthodox death for the last surviving grandson of Edward III, and represented the end of an era.

This solemn contemporary eyewitness account is at odds with the version given by Edward Hall just under a century later, who portrayed the cardinal as obsessed with his wealth and desperately hoping to buy his way out of death, lamenting 'why should I dye having so muche ryches?'[9] This entry probably served as the chief source used by Shakespeare to dramatise the cardinal's final moments in Act III, Scene 3 of his play *Henry VI Part II* when he depicted the king observing his rambling, 'wretch' of a great-uncle dying without giving a sign that he anticipated seeing 'heaven's bliss'. The earl of Warwick, for whom there is no supporting evidence, in the play is present at the deathbed of his father's uncle and notes how 'so bad a death argues a monstrous life'. It clearly wasn't just the life of Richard III with which the Bard took creative licence.[10]

Henry asked to be buried in Winchester, and just before his death ordered the reconstruction of St Swithun's shrine, which had been positioned behind the high altar in a silver reliquary since the tenth century. He provided a significant endowment of £706 18*s* in gold and silver for the work, requesting that the shrine was relocated to the retro-choir, close to where his chantry chapel awaited construction.[11] The new shrine, contemporarily acknowledged to have been 'gyfyne by my lord Cardinall Bewford',[12] was only inaugurated thirty years later, in July 1476.

Meticulous as always, the cardinal left detailed instructions for the

chantry chapel that was to house his imposing grey marble tomb and the structure was erected next to the new shrine. The chantry had numerous crocheted pinnacles rising towards the retro-choir roof and was decorated on the interior with intricate fan vaulting, in the centre of which was the Beaufort coat of arms borne by an angel. A glorious stone effigy of Henry, hands clasped devoutly in prayer and attired in the striking scarlet robes of his rank, still rests atop the tomb, albeit a later reconstruction. Although some of the inscription around the sarcophagus has been lost over time, one intriguing Latin line remains; *Tribularer si nescirem misericordias tuas,* or 'I should be in anguish, did I not know thy mercies'. Was Henry acknowledging a sinful life, or was this merely the typical lamentations of a medieval churchman?

The answer perhaps lies in the cardinal's will, which exhibits little evidence of spiritual torment or fear of impending holy judgment. In the document, dated 20 January 1446 with two codicils in the days preceding his death, Henry requested that his funeral was not too pompous, preferring to leave the finer details to his executors, headed by his nephew Dorset and fellow cardinal John Kemp, archbishop of York. Henry ordered ten thousand Masses to be said for his soul as soon as possible after death, with three Masses to be celebrated daily thereafter. He was also keen for masses to be sung for the souls of his parents, John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford, his siblings John, Thomas and Joan, kings Henry IV and V, and John, duke of Bedford. Intriguingly, his nephew John, the 1st Duke, is not mentioned, neither is Thomas, duke of Clarence, Humphrey, duke of Gloucester nor Richard II. The cardinal evidently did not deem the four men worthy of remembrance, which also adds weight to the suggestion Henry may have become estranged from Somerset shortly before the duke's death three years earlier.

Henry Beaufort was generous with his colossal wealth, contrary to his later reputation. He bequeathed a gold cup to his great-nephew Henry VI, which had belonged to the king's father, with a religious item known as the Tablet of Bourbon and a gold plate used for spices. Queen Margaret received a tapestry that had decorated her chamber when she stayed in Henry's palace at Bishop's Waltham, while the

prior and convent of Winchester received £200 with an embroidered vestment intended for his successor as bishop. A debt of £366, meanwhile, owed by St Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury, was cancelled – providing Mass was said for the cardinal three times a day, with money also left to the cathedrals of Canterbury and Lincoln, again in exchange for Masses. The king's projects at Eton and King's College, Cambridge, also benefitted, receiving £1,000 apiece. Henry also set aside the generous sum of £400 for the prisoners of London's jails, with 2,000 marks for distribution among his poorest tenants. Another £2,000 was to be circulated among the cardinal's domestic servants, with any remaining goods reserved for charitable purposes, such as relieving poor religious houses, marrying poor maidens and generally aiding the poor and needy. Unsurprisingly, his surviving nephews were catered for: Edmund was left £200 and a golden cup worth £40 while John, referred to as bastard of Somerset, and William Swnyford received £400 apiece as well as some silver. Presumably the latter pair were in far greater need of money than their more politically successful cousin.[13]

One other person of note was mentioned in Henry's will, second only to the king, and that was Joan, commonly accepted to be an illegitimate daughter of the cardinal. It is unknown if Joan was born before or after the churchman took his holy orders, but if she was indeed his daughter, as seems likely, then her name suggests she was named for her paternal aunt, the countess of Westmorland. Unfortunately, her mother has avoided any satisfactory contemporary identification and little is known of the child's early life. There is no other evidence of further licentiousness on the part of Henry, and in fact this appears to be his only known personal indiscretion.

Possibly through the cardinal's influence, Joan was married to Edward Stradling of St Donat's, a Glamorganshire knight who greatly benefitted from his wife's connections.[14] On 4 December 1423, Stradling was appointed Chamberlain and Receiver of South Wales, having provided 500 marks to the king as security for his good behaviour, the money possibly coming from the private coffers of his father-in-law. In early May 1425, Stradling was given some lands in

Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire, including the castle and lordship of Narberth and one-third of the town of St Clears, while on 20 June 1427, he was commissioned by the Council to investigate claims of treason against a canon of Talley Abbey.[15] In April 1431, Stradling was even briefly appointed one of the King's Justices in South Wales, and received further favour from Cardinal Beaufort when, in November 1434, he was appointed constable of Taunton Castle, replacing the recently deceased Beaufort cousin, Thomas Chaucer.[16] As for his will, Henry left the Stradlings two dozen dishes, four charger plates, twelve salt cellars, a portion of silver vessels and £100 in gold. They were clearly a couple of exceptional importance to the cardinal of England, reinforcing the assumption Joan was Henry's natural daughter. There is little other explanation for her prominence in his will.

Henry Beaufort was a colossus of the first half of the fifteenth century; although he had been bishop, chancellor and cardinal, these positions don't do justice to the considerable impact he had on the direction of English governance during his lengthy and tumultuous career. He enjoyed magnificent success, having been chancellor during the pinnacle of Henry V's reign followed by elevation to the cardinalate, but also suffered devastating setbacks, including the deaths of his brothers and nephews and sporadic removal from authority during the power struggles that persisted throughout Henry VI's minority.

He was bold, unforgiving and willing to stubbornly fight his corner if required, as his quarrels with his royal nephews, Henry V, Bedford and Gloucester, attest. The cardinal was not averse to making enemies, although his unwavering objective always remained fixed: to ensure the survival of his father's Lancastrian dynasty on the throne of England, and, as far as possible, of France. By the time of his death, Henry had overseen the first fifty years of Lancastrian rule, and was, in effect, the last man standing from the revolution of 1399. He was a supporter of conciliar government, a munificent benefactor, a faithful master and an assiduous servant. His skills in diplomacy garnered respect across Europe, as did his astute political intellect and

foresight. If Henry Beaufort appeared proud and arrogant at times, then this seems natural for a man of his high status and illustrious pedigree. He was, after all, a grandson of Edward III.

It is unsurprising a man known to history as 'the Rich Cardinal' is perhaps best known for his vast treasure. The source of his magnificent wealth has always remained a mystery as many of his personal records have been destroyed, but it seems likely to have been chiefly accumulated from careful fiscal management of the extraordinary revenues of his See, the richest in medieval England. Henry did not undertake any building projects on the scale of his predecessor or successor, and was considerably more prudent in his spending. He maintained a fine court and travelled in style, but no more so than many of his peers. The cardinal was not a profligate man.

His reputation has nonetheless suffered from accusations by later generations of usury, an immoral practice prohibited by the Church and condemned in the Bible. The evidence available does not support such a hefty charge, however. It was commonplace for medieval kings to give their creditors interest on loans, whether this was in the form of taxation, customs fees, jewels or lands. The cardinal always ensured his loans were covered, but never appears to have excessively profited from his lending, often recouping only what he had lent. In total, from his first loan in May 1404 to his last in August 1446, Henry Beaufort provided a staggering total of £212,303 across fifty-three loans.[17]

It seems fair to accuse Henry of using his extensive wealth to obtain, and then retain, undue influence over king and council, then manipulating his position to advance the interests of his Beaufort kinsfolk above others. He was nothing if not a proficient political opportunist. His loans, for example, funded Dorset's campaigns to France in 1436 and 1437, and Somerset's missions in 1440 and 1443. He was hardly alone in exhibiting nepotistic behaviour in the fifteenth century, and it's crucial to acknowledge Henry's loans were always provided with the king's interests in mind, rather than for mere profiteering. Conversely, the crown also took advantage of Henry,

even resorting to extortion in 1420 and 1432. Without the deep pockets and financial acumen of the cardinal, the House of Lancaster would have faced financial catastrophe far earlier than the 1450s.

As with Richard III, the enduring if misleading image of the 'haughty cardinal' stems from the pen of Shakespeare, who disparagingly portrayed Henry as 'lascivious, wanton' and a 'scarlet hypocrite', alleging the cardinal was more 'like a soldier than a man o' the church'. This is at odds with the contemporary account given in the *Croyland Chronicle* of 'a man rendered illustrious above all the nobles of England, by his probity and wisdom, wealth and renown'.[18]

To Henry VI, however, must go the last word on the great-uncle who crowned him king of France:

> He was a very dear uncle to me and most liberal in his lifetime. The Lord reward him.[19]

Sorrow upon Sorrow and Death for Death 1447–1453

Although appointed Lieutenant-General of France on Christmas Eve 1446, Edmund Beaufort's departure was delayed by the arrest of Gloucester and death of his uncle Henry. His preparations were also impacted by rising hostility from the commons towards the king's closest advisors, particularly once news of the planned cession of Maine and Anjou became public. Beaufort was not, however, the chief target. That dubious honour belonged to the Marquis of Suffolk.

On 25 May 1447, Suffolk appeared before the Council to justify actions in recent years, and successfully defended himself against accusations of disloyalty to the crown.[1] Despite the outcry over the handover of Maine and Anjou, which would leave Normandy unguarded against invasion from the south, Edmund was formally commanded by Suffolk on 27 July to order his lieutenants to transfer their fortresses to Mathew Gough and Fulk Eyton, royal administrators appointed on behalf of Henry VI to 'take and receive, upon our part, and into our hands, from our very dear and well-beloved cousin, the marquis of Dorset', all the towns and castles in the two counties.

This was easier said than done; Dorset's captains refused to comply, demanding compensation for their enforced withdrawal, not to mention reimbursement for the large number of English settlers facing eviction from their homes. The defiant captain of Le Mans, Osbern Mundeford, even declared he would only receive such orders from Dorset himself. The marquis, whom Suffolk hoped would be induced to assist the transfer once appointed lieutenant, did the opposite. If his captains demanded compensation, then they were taking their lead from their lord.

The king was irked by the delay, and on 23 October wrote to his 'very dear and well-beloved cousin' Dorset to voice concern that the

captains' refusal to yield to his commissioners would force the English to miss the prearranged handover deadline of 1 November, which would be to his 'bitter displeasure'. Dorset was told, in no uncertain terms, that 'we order, command, and as strictly as may be we charge you' to hand over Maine without 'making any more pretences, excuses or delays'.[2]

Such obstinate defiance from Beaufort paid off, however; on 13 November, the French agreed to fund a pension of 10,000 *livres tournois* for his losses, while in December another payment of 24,000 *livres tournois* was provided for English landowners in Maine, though it was later alleged that Edmund retained a significant cut for himself.[3] Nonetheless, Le Mans continued to hold out, prompting Charles VII to order an attack once the deadline lapsed. The castle eventually submitted in March 1448.

Beaufort's non-compliance does not appear to have caused any significant rift with King Henry, for on 20 December 1447 he received a payment of 4,000 marks to prepare for 'the reule, governaunce and kepyng' of Normandy, while on 31 January 1448, this was followed by a grant of £2,275 to recruit and sustain another thousand archers.[4] By the start of spring 1448, almost fifteen months after his appointment as lieutenant, Edmund's army assembled in Portsmouth, with orders given to Thomas Ovedale and William Mares on 21 March to take the muster.[5] Ten days later, as final preparations for his departure were underway, Edmund's earldom of Somerset was raised to a dukedom, bestowing upon him the same status his brother John had held for a year prior to his death. Similarly, Edmund was rewarded before, rather than after, services were rendered.

Edmund Beaufort was a bold and confident commander, which perhaps at times made him prone to recklessness. He preferred an offensive approach to war, and had no qualms about launching raids into hostile territory, besieging enemy towns, and generally disrupting the status quo. It seems likely he developed such a mindset during his short time under the tutelage of his stepfather Thomas, duke of Clarence, another impulsive Lancastrian warrior.

One of Somerset's first acts upon settling into his new role was to deal with the crippling cash shortages that were adversely affecting the duchy's defence, and in the summer of 1448 he initiated an anti-corruption programme known as the *réformation générale* in Lower Normandy to raise emergency funds. The new duke appointed several commissioners to investigate the conduct of royal officers, granting them power to examine all receipts and accounts, and to levy fines on any transgressors acting fraudulently. The most persistent offenders were threatened with imprisonment. Somerset received regular reports on his commissioners' progress, and any uncooperative officers were summoned into his presence to answer for their belligerent conduct. It was a drastic, but unpopular, measure among those who owed their positions to Somerset's predecessor, with many consigned to unemployment as a result. Somerset also revived the Norman Échiquier, or high court, on 14 October 1448 after a decade of abeyance, providing local citizens and landowners a forum to raise any disputes or petitions. Richard of York would later accuse Somerset of personally profiting from such punitive governance and claim that far from being genuinely concerned with justice and reinforcing law and order in the duchy, he was solely motivated by greed.[6] The truth probably lies somewhere in-between.

When it came to military matters, Somerset went on the attack from the moment he landed in Normandy, swiftly laying siege to French garrisons at Saint-James-de-Beuvron, Mont-Saint-Michel and Granville. A furious Charles VII dispatched envoys to England only three months after the duke's arrival to express his dissatisfaction with Somerset's aggressive behaviour, accusing the English of breaching the short peace treaty then in place. Compounding matters was the perceived disrespect Somerset had shown Charles in several letters between the pair, with the duke refusing to recognise the recipient as king of France, preferring to address him as 'the most high and powerful prince, the uncle in France of the king'.

An incensed Charles pedantically responded that there were four uncles of Henry in France, so it was unclear to whom the letters were intended. Somerset's actions seem surprising for someone connected

to the Suffolk faction, but the duke was clearly his own man, and beholden to no one. It's an irony that such behaviour would probably have earned Edmund the grudging respect of the deceased duke of Gloucester, that great adversary of the Beauforts.

Detrimental as Somerset's behaviour was to the peace process, he was merely fulfilling the expectation demanded of his role as lieutenant-general, which was to uphold the English claim in France, by force if necessary. How could he refer to Charles as king of France, for example, without betraying his own king's claim? Even so, considering the strength of Charles's force, it was clearly unwise to provoke the Valois king. Somerset had picked a fight, and having played right into Charles' hands, the French were only too keen to respond.

As soon as the truce expired on 17 June 1449, Charles declared war and set about systematically reconquering Normandy, town by town, until he arrived at the gates of Rouen. Charles was no longer focused on merely containing the English threat in the north of his kingdom, but on pushing them back across the Channel. For that to become a reality, Rouen, the centre of English operations in Normandy since 1419, had to fall.

Somerset's swift surrender of Rouen has led to accusations of cowardice from later English commentators, but the account of Monstrelet suggests the beleaguered lieutenant had little alternative if he wished to escape with his life, not to mention the lives of his family and soldiers. An army under the command of the most senior nobles of the French court, including the counts of Dunois, Nevers and Eu, appeared outside the city on 16 October 1449 and quickly signalled their intentions by launching an attack on the walls, although John Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury, successfully fended them off, killing between fifty and sixty Frenchmen in the process.

Two days later, the 'greatly frightened' inhabitants of the town assembled outside the bishop's palace, and implored Somerset to seek a truce before they were all destroyed. It had been six weeks since the town last received supplies such as corn, wood, meat and wine, and

the populace were concerned they would starve during a protracted siege. The duke, facing a fervent crowd of around a thousand people with only sixty English soldiers at his side, ‘addressed himself with much humility’, declaring ‘he was ready to do whatever the inhabitants of the town should wish’. Hoping to appease the citizens, Somerset permitted the archbishop of Rouen and some of the citizens to confer with the French king to secure safe conducts for those within the city, but when they returned with terms of surrender, the English leadership chose instead to arm themselves and withdraw into the safety of the castle.

The alarmed Rouennais also took up arms in response and, after a tense standoff during the night of 18 October, turned on their English occupiers the following morning, lynching some soldiers before opening the town gates to Dunois and Nevers. French troops poured into the narrow streets of Rouen, and swiftly prepared themselves for an assault on the fortress. Such was the scope of the army, Monstrelet believed that ‘never, in the memory of man, had the king so grand or so numerous an assembly of lords, barons, knights, and esquires, with common men, as were now under his orders’. Observing events from inside the castle alongside his wife and children, it is little wonder Somerset was ‘afflicted at heart to see the great army the king had brought against him’. His only recourse was to seek a conference with King Charles.

The duke was escorted from the castle to St Catherine’s Abbey, where he finally met the French king face to face, an awkward encounter no doubt considering Somerset’s previous insolence in letters between the pair. Nonetheless, Edmund was respectful in his demeanour, before optimistically requesting

> that his majesty would be pleased to allow him and Lord Talbot, with the men under their command, to march away with their baggage in safety, according to the terms of the general amnesty which had been agreed to by the lords of his council.

After deliberating upon the matter, Charles responded that such a request was unreasonable, for the English still occupied the castle, and had already attempted to prevent the Rouennais from surrendering their city. Furthermore, for any agreement to be reached, the English also had to handover the towns of Honfleur and Harfleur, along with other possessions in the county of Caux. Upon receiving this ultimatum, Somerset

> took leave of the king and returned to the palace, and saw every one, in all the streets he passed through, wearing the white cross, which did not tend to raise his spirits.

By the morning of 22 October, eight hundred French men-at-arms and many more archers were strategically placed around the castle, with cannons pointed towards the bulwarks and deep trenches preventing an English escape. Somerset's situation was clearly dire, and 'having considered that there was very little provision or stores within the palace, and a great many men, and that there was not a possibility of his being relieved', the duke requested another meeting with the king. Six days later, 28 October, he was again conducted back to St Catherine's, accompanied on this occasion by forty of his principal knights while dressed in a long robe of blue velvet with a crimson velvet bonnet on his head. Somerset's second attempt to secure favourable terms were rejected, however, and Charles decided to step up his campaign to break English resolve. Resistance was clearly futile, and after a third round of talks staggered over the following twelve days, this time with the count of Dunois, who was leading the siege, Somerset finally submitted.[7]

The terms of the surrender, which Edmund personally signed in the lower margin and sealed in red wax with his Beaufort arms, permitted the duke to safely retreat to Caen with his wife and children. The cost of such freedom, however, was substantial; Edmund had to pay fifty thousand *saluts* of gold within one year, at quarterly intervals, although he was allowed to take most of his goods with him, apart from any heavy artillery. To ensure the ransom was

forthcoming, several prisoners were retained by the French, including the heirs of the earl of Ormond and lords Bergavenny, Dacre and Ros, the latter the duke's stepson, with their release dependent upon timely repayment. The foremost hostage taken was John Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury and Somerset's brother-in-law.

Charles struck a hard bargain, for on the same day the towns of Arques, Tancarville, Lillebonne, Caudebec, Montevilliers and Honfleur were also relinquished. It was a devastating blow to the English cause in France, and acutely felt by Somerset who had already lost control of his own fortresses of Harcourt and Saint-Guillaume-de-Mortain at the end of August. Nonetheless, the duke promised, 'in good faith, and upon the word of a prince', to honour the terms of his humiliating surrender, and departed Rouen on 4 November, heading eighty miles west to Caen.[8]

Although Monstrelet's account suggested Somerset had little choice, the swift capitulation of Rouen caused considerable damage to his martial reputation in England. His honour was even questioned by Sir John Fastolf, one of the leading English captains in France and a veteran of the Agincourt campaign, who suggested several accusatory questions be put to the duke regarding his conduct throughout 1449. Fastolf wanted to know why Somerset encouraged an Aragonese mercenary named François de Surienne to capture the prosperous Breton border town of Fougères on 24 March, forcing the duke of Brittany to repudiate his noncommittal stance to the war and seek alliance with Charles VII. Surienne, for his part, later testified Somerset had been more 'joyful about the said capture than if one had given him a hundred thousand crowns of gold', while also implicating Suffolk in the controversial enterprise that breached the Anglo-French truce.[9]

Fastolf also demanded to know why Somerset left several English garrisons without adequate artillery or provisions while failing to pay the wages of his soldiers. Lastly, he wanted Somerset taken to task over the compensation package he received from the French, which rather than finding its way into the hands of landowners like himself

had been used for the duke's 'own private advantage'. Although the Council disregarded Fastolf's complaints, it was clear there was a growing consensus in certain quarters that Somerset was acting contrary to the best interests of his countrymen.[10]

Unsure of the king's opinion of the surrender of Rouen and wary of calls for his head, Edmund wisely chose to remain in Normandy rather than return to England. Caen provided the Beaufort family with refuge throughout the winter months, but with spring approaching, Charles was preparing to resume his relentless campaign to reconquer Normandy. On 4 February 1450, King Henry responded by arranging for defensive provisions to be shipped to Robert Whittingham, captain of Caen, including 1,000lbs of gunpowder, 1,000lbs of saltpetre to preserve food, 500lbs of brimstone and 600 bows with a thousand sheaves of arrows.[11] This was followed a month later by a large army under the command of Sir Thomas Kyriel, dispatched across the Channel to aid Somerset who was in 'grete jubardye of his person and yn doubt of losyng of all that contree'.[12] Kyriel never reached his intended destination, for he was intercepted on 15 April by a Franco-Breton army outside Formigny and soundly defeated in the first pitched battle between the two kingdoms in fifteen years. The French quickly followed up their rousing triumph by capturing Vire and Avranches before retaking Bayeux on 16 May.

The successive losses ended any reasonable hope the English had of salvaging their position in Normandy. The beleaguered Beaufort duke had little time to lament the situation, for on 5 June he was again besieged by the relentless French, this time at Caen. The town had fallen into English hands in September 1417 through the combined efforts of Henry V and Somerset's stepfather Clarence, and had represented Lancastrian supremacy in the duchy for over thirty years. What little remained of Beaufort's reputation as a military commander in France depended on his ability to defend Caen.

The town was besieged from multiple directions by four separate divisions, with one commanded by the French king and the others by the duke of Alençon and counts of Clermont, Dunois and Nevers.

Although Somerset had 3,000 soldiers at his disposal, this paled in comparison with the best the French could offer, and like Rouen, his situation was desperate. His only response was to barricade himself and his family in the high stone keep and hope the siege would fail. It was wishful thinking.

Shortly after the attack commenced, a gun stone fired from a French cannon landed in the courtyard between Duchess Eleanor and her children, prompting the panicked lady to drop to her knees and beseech her husband to submit. Somerset, apparently 'moved by the dolour of his wife and love of his children', reluctantly agreed, and having arranged terms of surrender for the second time in only eight months, handed over the town on 1 July 1450 to his delighted adversaries.[13] Cherbourg, the last significant English fortress in Normandy, exposed by Caen's capture, subsequently fell on 12 August. The much-celebrated gains of Henry V between 1415 and 1420 were undone in just over a year, and unfortunately for the reputation of Edmund Beaufort, who again avoided England by heading for Calais, it happened on his watch. No amount of excuses or reasoning could eradicate that fact, and it would have dire consequences for the houses of Beaufort and Lancaster.

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If the loss of Normandy reflected badly on Somerset, for Suffolk it proved to be deadly. The loss of the duchy, coming soon after the cession of Maine and Anjou, sparked widespread anger in England, and as the king's foremost advisor, the weight of responsibility inevitably fell upon the shoulders of William de la Pole. The commons wanted blood.

From the moment parliament convened in November 1449, only a few weeks after the fall of Rouen, there was a clamour for Suffolk's destruction, with charges prepared against the duke for treason. Suffolk may have been rapacious for wealth and power, but a traitor to his king in the traditional sense he was not. During the Christmas break, tensions in the kingdom violently manifested when Suffolk's

adherent, Adam Moleyns, bishop of Chichester and until recently Lord Privy Seal, was viciously murdered in Portsmouth by disgruntled sailors who held him partly accountable for the catastrophe in Normandy. When parliament reassembled, a shaken Suffolk launched a defiant defence of his conduct, desperately stressing his lengthy fealty to the king and recalling his family's outstanding record of service to the Lancastrians. It was to no avail. He was indicted by the Commons in February, who boldly declared the duke, 'falsely and traitorously, hath ymagined, compassed, purposed, forethought, doon and committed dyvers high, grete, heinous and horrible treasons'.

One of the most serious counts against Suffolk was the allegation he intended to conspire with the French to invade England and replace Henry VI on the throne with his young son John. The commons claimed Suffolk intended to capitalise on the royal lineage of his six-year-old ward Margaret Beaufort, 'purposyng to marie her to his seid sonne, presumyng and pretendyng her to be next enheritable to the Corone'.[14] Despite Suffolk's unquestionable ambition, the charge was clearly absurd, although it is notable as the first known instance of when a potential Beaufort claim to the English throne is mentioned, some three decades before Margaret's own son Henry Tudor emerged as a Beaufort-descended candidate for the crown.

Although clamour for Suffolk's ruin was overwhelming, the king was unwilling to consign his favourite to a traitor's death and attempted to rescue Suffolk from his predicament by using the royal prerogative to banish the duke from England for five years. Although his life was saved, Suffolk's destruction was complete. His authority between 1445 and 1450 had been extensive and unsurpassed as he accumulated office after office, including chamberlain of England, captain of Calais, Warden of the Cinque Ports, constable of Dover Castle and Chief Steward of the Duchy of Lancaster. In 1448 he had even been raised to a duke, giving him equal status to those of royal blood such as York, Somerset and Exeter. His political pre-eminence had depended on salvaging the English position in Normandy and the retaining the favour of the king, and when the former was lost and latter withdrawn, Suffolk's fate was sealed.

The duke left England on 30 April 1450 but never reached his intended destination. His ship was intercepted in the Strait of Dover by a vessel called the *Nicholas of the Tower*, the crew of which welcomed the banished duke aboard with a mocking cry of 'Welcome, traitor'. A letter written a few days later reported that Suffolk was subjected to a mock trial before being placed onto a small rowing boat on 3 May, where 'one of the lewdest of the ship bade him lay down his head' before taking a rusty sword to 'smote off his head within half a dozen strokes'.[15] It is not known who perpetrated the bloody deed, or whether it was politically motivated or merely the act of opportunistic pirates, but the outcome appeased many in England; William de la Pole, for a brief time the mightiest of English magnates, in power if not prestige, was dead. One chronicler, however, writing with the benefit of hindsight and knowledge of the impending political crisis, lamented the brutal act, for Suffolk's extrajudicial execution 'began sorow upon sorow, and deth for deth'.[16]

Edmund Beaufort's reaction to Suffolk's death is unrecorded, but it must surely have shaken the duke to his very core. If Suffolk could be slaughtered in such a barbaric manner, as was Moleyns, a bishop of the church no less, then so could he. It wouldn't have escaped Somerset's memory how his grandfather John of Gaunt was targeted by mob violence in 1381 and forced to flee to Scotland. Somerset's fear of retribution was hardly eased when news emerged of an uprising in Kent under the command of the shadowy figure of Jack Cade, his force bolstered by disgruntled soldiers returning from Normandy and bearing significant grudges against Somerset and other leading royal counsellors. As the bitter veterans trudged through the Kent countryside, they voiced their frustrations to the local populace, and together the two groups resolved to forcibly remove those they deemed culpable for their woes. As with many uprisings before and after it, it was not an attack on the king himself but rather on those assembled around him.

With Cade at the forefront, the rebels marched towards London, prompting King Henry to advance south from Leicester with an impressive royal army numbering around 20,000. If the Londoners

thought they were about to finally witness the king display the type of decisive leadership long anticipated from a son of Henry V, they were sorely mistaken. After a small skirmish with Cade's men near Sevenoaks on 18 June, the startled king turned on his heels and fled back north to Kenilworth Castle. The revolt spread through southern England, and on 29 June, William Ayscough, bishop of Salisbury and the royal confessor, was dragged from Edington Church in Wiltshire and pummelled to death. His crime was that he married the king to Margaret of Anjou in 1445.

By 2 July Cade had advanced as far as Southwark, on the south bank of the Thames, and marched across London Bridge the following day and into a city abandoned by its monarch. Two days later another royal favourite, James Fiennes, Baron Saye and Sele and Lord Treasurer, was beheaded after being dragged from the Tower by a baying mob. It was complete anarchy.

Cade's grievances were many, but centred upon the conviction the king was surrounded by 'insaciable, covetows malicious' persons who believed 'good is evyll and evyll is good'. His manifesto also lamented how Henry had lost his law, his merchandise, the sea and France, with the common people unfairly destroyed in the process. The destitute king, meanwhile, was 'so set that he may not pay for his mete nor drynke, and he owyte more than evar eny Kynge of Yngland owght'. The rebels' purpose was simple: to remove, by deadly force if necessary, all the 'false progeny and affinity' of Suffolk and in their stead place the dukes of York, Exeter, Buckingham and Norfolk. One duke noticeably missing from this proposed list of acceptable councillors was Edmund Beaufort.[17]

Before the rebels could arrange Somerset's destruction, however, they quickly outstayed their welcome in London. Although the citizens had initially been receptive to Cade and his men, their drunken looting of the city provoked a violent response from the harassed Londoners on 5 July, and after a bloody skirmish on London Bridge Cade's force retreated south and gradually dispersed. A bounty of 1,000 marks was subsequently put on Cade's head, and after being

cornered in East Sussex on 12 July he was fatally wounded while resisting capture. His head returned to London Bridge one final time, where it was spiked as a warning to others.

The English establishment were horrified by the collapse of law and order in the south-east, a situation hardly helped by an unnerved king cowering behind Kenilworth's robust walls and deep moat. As God's representative on Earth, Henry was expected to uphold justice, to maintain peace throughout his realm and wholeheartedly serve in the best interests of his subjects. To many of his people, he was proving inadequate in every area. Somerset, for his part, had astutely maintained a low profile during the violence and was probably still overseas in Calais.

A consequence of the rebellion, and fulfilling one of Cade's demands, was the return to frontline politics of Richard of York. After the duke had lost his position in Normandy to Somerset in December 1446, Suffolk and the queen were determined not to allow York to become a hindrance to their authority in England and so in December 1447 he was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland for ten years. The appointment was logical; Ireland required an experienced commander of royal blood to re-establish English governance, and York, connected to the country by virtue of his Mortimer ancestry, already possessed the earldom of Ulster. If he was frustrated by the posting, York's time in Ireland soon worked to his benefit.

As Lancastrian authority collapsed in England, glances were cast across the Irish Sea towards Duke Richard, who remained a credible figure in the eyes of the disenfranchised commons, unblemished by the loss of Normandy or the socio-political turmoil that followed. The greatest landowner in the kingdom was about to make a play for power, with only Somerset, who returned to England in August 1450 once the rebellion was quelled, in his way.

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As news of Suffolk's demise, Cade's rebellion and Edmund Beaufort's return reached York in Ireland, the duke organised his troops and

departed for the mainland, landing on the north Welsh coast in early September 1450. It was a disconcerting development for the depleted court party, uncertain of York's intention towards the throne. Since Gloucester's death it was unclear who was heir to King Henry, with both York and Somerset possessing reasonable claims. York's ancestry was certainly illustrious, as he was descended from both the second and fourth surviving sons of Edward III. It also didn't go unnoticed that Cade frequently used the Mortimer name during his uprising, an unsubtle reminder of York's royal lineage.

As a Beaufort, the duke of Somerset was descended from Edward III through the king's third son John of Gaunt, and was Henry VI's closest English male-line relation since the deaths of Bedford, Gloucester and the cardinal. Another close Lancastrian relation of the king's was Henry Holland, the twenty-year-old 3rd Duke of Exeter and grandson of Elizabeth of Lancaster, sister of Henry IV. Exeter was also York's son-in-law, having been betrothed to the eight-year-old Anne in 1447. A fourth option was Humphrey Stafford, duke of Buckingham, a great-grandson of Edward III through his mother, Anne of Gloucester. The obvious choice, however, remained York.

Richard arrived in London on 27 September at the head of an armed retinue of thousands, seeking 'reformacion of certayn injuries and wronges' done against him.[18] He marched through the streets of London, taking great care to show himself to the citizens among whom he enjoyed significant support, before heading to Westminster Palace for a tense summit with Henry VI. The forthright duke offered to assume command of the government on behalf of the king, hoping to re-establish good governance and financial probity, a proposal that was politely declined. Henry had little need for York's counsel, for he had already decided upon Suffolk's replacement as his chief advisor; Edmund Beaufort.

York struggled to contain his frustration, a circumstance hardly helped by Somerset's appointment as Constable of England on 11 September, the most senior military post in the kingdom and which had recently become vacant due to Suffolk's death.[19] Considering his

failure to defend Normandy, Beaufort had, if anything, been promoted on his return to England, a reward York considered deeply unwarranted, as he simply could not fathom his own continued exclusion.

Parliament convened in Westminster on 6 November 1450, and York's chamberlain Sir William Oldhall was elected speaker of the Commons, providing Richard another platform to further his campaign for reform, and with it, the destruction of Somerset's court party. Oldhall, effectively serving as York's mouthpiece, demanded widespread restructuring of the royal household and improved financial management, noting how the king was in debt to the 'grete and grevous' amount of £372,000 with an annual income of only £5,000. Concern was also voiced about the 'many murdres, manslaughters, rapes, robberies, riottys, affrays and other inconvenientes' committed throughout the realm, noted to be 'gretter than afore'. The chief concern, however, fuelled by York, was the removal of the king's leading councillors. Those targeted were even named, and charged with

> mysbehavyng aboute youre Roiall persone, and in other places, by whos undue means youre posessions have been gretely amenused, youre lawes not exeuted, and the peas of this your Reame not observed nother kept, to youre grete hurt, and trouble of the liege people of this your Reame.

It was a stirring statement, and the very first name on the list of shame was 'Edmond, Duke of Somerset'. It was he, above all, who was now held responsible for the collapse of law and order, the royal finances and the subsequent difficulties faced by the common people. Somerset was followed by his cousin Alice Chaucer, dowager duchess of Suffolk, and a list of bishops, abbots, barons, knights and squires numbering twenty-six, one of which included 'master John Somerset', possibly the bastard son of John Beaufort and Edmund's nephew. The Commons demanded all offenders be 'voided and removed from youre most noble presense, persone and estate' for life, with an added

provision they be forbidden from coming within twelve miles of the king. All offices and fees, it was hoped, would be forfeit by 1 December.[20]

It was a populist agenda in the same vein as Cade's earlier manifesto, though York and the Commons were careful not to legitimise the dead traitor's cause. The duke attempted to position himself as the only noble with the interests of the people at heart, while denouncing Somerset as the leader of a corrupt and incompetent faction.

King Henry paid little heed to the complaints, however, having unwisely failed to learn from the violent downfall of Suffolk. His response to the last article declared he was 'not sufficiently learned of eny cause why they shuld be removed' from his side, prompting such indignant rage among York's supporters that they initiated a sustained and systematic attack on Somerset's property. On 26 November, goods worth 40 shillings were taken from one of his houses in Grantham, while on 1 December men from Framlingham broke into one of his estates in Sudbury and made off with some silver and worsted wool. At the same time, Somerset's servant Geoffrey Elys petitioned for the return of some of the goods stolen from another property near Wisbech, including three silver dishes, some cloth of Arras, a featherbed and a black coffer.[21]

Perhaps most serious of all was the attempted attack on Somerset's person that occurred on the evening of 1 December, the date by which the Commons had demanded all offices and fees be surrendered. The duke was feasting at the Blackfriars Priory in Ludgate when several armed soldiers attempted to break through the doors. Somerset fled in panic through the corridors of the priory until he reached a small boat on the nearby Thames, embarking before he could be seized by his pursuers. He had been forced to leave behind his possessions in his haste to escape, prompting the author of *Gregory's Chronicle* to recount how the duke was 'robbyde of alle hys goodys, and hys jewyllys were takyn and borne away'.[22]

As Somerset recaptured his composure as he was rowed

downstream towards the protection of the Tower of London, the violent deaths of Suffolk, Saye and bishops Moleyns and Ayscough surely played on his mind. He had been moments away from sharing a similar fate. Lastly, around midnight on 10 December, the great Beaufort citadel at Corfe was ransacked by 'many riotous people' led by a Yorkist retainer named John Newport of Estwalworth, who 'took and bore away diverse goods' of the duke to the value of 1,000 marks, beating and maiming several of Somerset's servants in the process.[23]

Although there is little evidence York personally ordered the ambush or the numerous attacks on Somerset's property, facts didn't necessarily matter to those making sense of the violence. Rightly or wrongly, Somerset held York accountable, further worsening the poor relationship that was rapidly deteriorating into a blood feud. King Henry, his hand forced by an attempted abduction, perhaps even assassination, of his cousin, ordered Somerset to be lodged in the Tower, which unlike his previous visit was more for the duke's own safety rather than punishment. His stay was to be a short one; any momentum York and the Commons had for their cause was interrupted by the Christmas break, and with order restored to London by January, Somerset felt confident enough to emerge from the Tower. York, once again, retreated to his estates without his issues being resolved.

Somerset had, against what seemed insurmountable odds, retained his grip on power, and stubbornly clung to his position throughout 1451 in defiance of Richard of York. It wasn't an easy task, particularly as England was undergoing a protracted recession known as the Great Slump, but as the months passed his situation gradually improved. No more major uprisings took place, an Act of Resumption was passed in June 1451, albeit not as extensive as York desired, and thoughts turned to the defence of Gascony, which, with Calais, was the last remaining part of English-controlled France. Somerset even overcame the impertinence of a York-connected MP named Thomas Young, who petitioned the king in the summer to publicly declare his heir, with Richard predictably proposed. He was promptly arrested for his presumption.

Several grants and appointments towards the end of the year reinforced Somerset's resurgence. In September, as a response to Burgundian aggression Edmund was named captain of Calais, handing him control of the largest permanent garrison in royal hands, followed by the lieutenancy of the Marches of Picardy, Flanders and Artois in December.[24] On 12 November, meanwhile, the sheriff of Somerset and Dorset was ordered to pay the duke £20 a year for the maintenance of his estate, followed with a second grant for the same amount on 18 December.

The preamble accompanying the first grant provided an intriguing insight into the relationship between the king and his Beaufort kinsmen, now primarily represented by Edmund, whom the king wished to reward:

> to extol and honour the behaviour of those who have done praiseworthy service, and especially his cousins whom he has marked as conspicuous for wisdom and noble deeds.

The grant continued, specifically celebrating Somerset 'who heretofore rendered much fruitful service, especially in the rescue of the town of Calais against attack', not only 'for his merits and nearness of blood' but for his 'exertions in war and wise counsel'. The differences in how York and the king viewed Somerset couldn't have been more marked.[25]

Wise though he may have been, Edmund Beaufort made a calamitous error in January 1452 when he authorised the apprehension of York's ally William Oldhall, disregarding the fact the MP had sought sanctuary in the church of St Martin-le-Grand after York's withdrawal from London. Somerset was fixated on destroying Oldhall, whom he considered responsible for the ambush at Blackfriars in December 1450, and dispatched an imposing delegation that included the earls of Salisbury, Wiltshire and Worcester to retrieve him by force. The breach of sanctuary caused sufficient outrage among the Londoners to force Somerset to cease his interrogation of Oldhall in Westminster and to release the prisoner

only two days later.[26] Worse than that, it infuriated York, personally offended by the severe treatment of his loyal servant.

Determined more than ever to remove Somerset from power, York launched an astonishing attack on his adversary in a letter to the burgesses and citizens of Shrewsbury on 3 February 1452. Richard publicly attributed the loss of Normandy to Somerset, even accusing his fellow duke of encouraging the king's enemies to conquer Gascony and Guienne. York, who cautiously referred to himself as the king's 'true liege man', also alleged his plans for reform had been swept aside 'through the envy, malice, and untruth' of Somerset, who was actively attempting to bring about York's ruin. The purpose of the letter was to make it known how, 'after long sufferance', York intended to remove Somerset, who 'ever prevaileth and ruleth about the King's person', from power before the kingdom was irrevocably destroyed.[27]

Having garnered support from allies such as Edward Brooke, Baron Cobham and Thomas Courtenay, earl of Devon and widower of Somerset's sister Margaret Beaufort, York mustered an army numbering thousands, and marched south-east until he was camped outside Dartford in Kent on 1 March. Whether he intended it or not, such overt military action could only ever be perceived as an attack on the crown's authority, and King Henry, no doubt with prodding by Somerset, had little option but to respond in kind, escalating an already tense and dangerous state of affairs.

With two armies preparing for battle, only the intervention of the bishops of Ely and Winchester and the Neville earls of Salisbury and Warwick calmed the situation. The Nevilles were closely related to both York and Somerset and were well placed to act as intermediaries between the two parties. York was permitted to air his grievances against Somerset, which were similar in nature to Fastolf's accusations in 1449, alleging Beaufort was responsible for the loss of Normandy while lining his pockets with compensation intended for the common landowner. The king, eager to bring the embarrassing situation to a peaceful resolution without the shedding of any blood, assured York

he would consider his articles for reform and even promised to remove Somerset from his council. York was satisfied and disbanded his army, unaware he had been deceived.

When the buoyant duke entered the royal tent to face the king, he was stunned to find Somerset 'still awaytyng upon the kyng as chief aboute hym'. York was forced to accompany the king back to London 'like a prysoner', where on 10 March he was made to swear his allegiance to Henry outside St Paul's as though he was but a lowly traitor.[28] It was a public humiliation, almost certainly orchestrated by Somerset to discredit and embarrass his rival. Three days later at Westminster, both dukes were bound to keep the peace, the cost of which would be £20,000 to the person who breached the truce,[29] which recent events had shown was likely to be York. Edmund Beaufort had again trumped Richard and, not for the first time, his seething rival trudged back to the Welsh Marches while the former 'abode about the King', over whom he still 'had gret rewl'.[30]

Somerset was heartened by this latest failure to destroy him. York may have had the support of the commons, but Edmund enjoyed the backing of his king, demonstrated by another series of grants over the following year. On 6 September 1452, Somerset was granted, in tail male, the island and lordship of Wight, including Carisbrooke Castle and several West Country manors, including Stoke Underhampden, Milton Fauconberge, Midsomer Norton, Shipton Mallet, Curry Mallet and Ryme. On 16 December, meanwhile, he received all the manors, lordships and lands belonging to William Plessington during his minority, while the following May he was granted the Hertfordshire manors of Hunsdon and Eastwick, recently stripped from William Oldhall. Lastly, on 2 July, in reward for 'good service', Edmund was appointed for Justice in Eyre of all forests and parks south of the Trent as well as Master of the Game.[31]

In the meantime, Somerset also concentrated once more on governing England, and on 23 October 1452 celebrated the news that his brother-in-law John Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury, had recaptured Bordeaux. Even more welcome was the news, in the spring of 1453,

that Queen Margaret was finally pregnant, eight years after the royal wedding. Life was far from perfect for Edmund Beaufort, but with York in retreat and the promise of a Lancastrian heir to consolidate the king's position, the constable of England could be forgiven for feeling optimistic about the future, both for himself and for his burgeoning dynasty. Things were never straightforward for the Beauforts, though, and Somerset's world was about to be turned upside down.

Fire, Rancour and Envy
1453–1455

The Lancastrian position in France had been steadily declining from the moment Joan of Arc entered the service of Charles VII in 1429, and by July 1453, with the English already ousted from Normandy and threatened in Calais, King Henry's men faced capitulation in Gascony. John Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury, had been dispatched to the duchy the previous year to impede the French advance, and although initially successful, having recaptured Bordeaux and restored English governance, lack of funds and soldiers left the English resistance worryingly exposed.

Sensing an advantage, French troops attacked Gascony from three different directions in early July and besieged the town of Castillon-sur-Dordogne, prompting Shrewsbury and his son Viscount Lisle to ride to its aid. Having received an erroneous report on 17 July suggesting the French were preparing to withdraw, Shrewsbury rashly ordered a charge, unaware of the vast reserves of French artillery awaiting their arrival. The earl's horse was subsequently 'struck down by a culverin-ball, and he was put to death' as he lay trapped underneath the animal, butchered while the remainder of his force, including his son, were cut to pieces by the guns.[1]

The defeat was devastating for the English, and stunned Henry and his councillors, including Edmund Beaufort. The loss was one of considerable personal and political consequence for the duke of Somerset, for not only did he mourn the deaths of his wife's brother-in-law and her nephew, he also faced the alarming repercussions of Gascony slipping out of English hands. As *de facto* head of the under-fire court party, Somerset's nervous mind probably wandered back to the savage execution of Suffolk three years earlier after the loss of Normandy.

With Shrewsbury and his army nullified, Bordeaux surrendered to Charles VII, for the final time, on 19 October 1453. After precisely three hundred years in English hands, Gascony had finally capitulated, and although neither party realised it at the time, the duchy remained lost to England forevermore. The Hundred Years War, as the protracted and complex Anglo-French conflict became known, ended in ignominious defeat for the English only thirty years after the triumph of the Treaty of Troyes. Except for Calais, the Lancastrian dynasty had been forcibly expelled from France, ending any grand English pretensions of ever truly ruling a united France.

The effect of the defeat at Castillon on Henry VI was immense, and almost certainly contributed to his complete mental breakdown in August while on progress with Somerset and the queen in the West Country. According to one chronicle, the king was 'indispost sodenly' while resting at a hunting lodge near Clarendon Palace, leaving the king unresponsive to repeated attempts to rouse him from his catatonic state. He didn't move, and he didn't speak, 'smyten with a ffransy' with 'his wit and reason withdrawen'. His eyes were vacant and he stared ahead with little sign of life. Henry was even incapable of feeding himself, and if it wasn't for attentive servants he would surely have starved.[2]

Though Henry had never been the most proactive of monarchs, a medieval kingdom, by its very nature, required a functioning king to personally or nominally oversee the day-to-day governance of his realm. Even if decisions, grants or bills were encouraged by others, such as Somerset, or Suffolk before him, all commands were ostensibly undertaken with the king's knowledge. Although a king could not personally rule while he was a minor, with a regency council often put in place, in 1453 Henry VI was a thirty-two-year-old man. There was no contingency plan.

Nobody had expected the king to take leave of his senses, least of all Queen Margaret or Edmund Beaufort, both of whom were forced to conceal the matter while they worked out what to do. It didn't escape their attention that the madness of Henry's French grandfather Charles

VI allowed a civil war between two rival court factions to spiral out of control, destabilising the kingdom to such an extent the English were able to exploit the resultant chaos. If they were initially successful containing the king's condition, Henry's malady could not be concealed indefinitely, a matter exacerbated by the long-awaited birth of a royal prince on 13 October 1453 at Westminster Palace.

The heir to the throne was born on the feast day of St Edward the Confessor, and was appropriately named after the royal saint. Bells tolled in every church and *Te Deums* were sung throughout London to celebrate the prince's arrival. Perhaps on account of his familiarity with Queen Margaret, one of the child's godfathers was Somerset, who fulfilled the office alongside Cardinal Kemp. Edmund's aunt, Anne Stafford, duchess of Buckingham and a daughter of Joan Beaufort, served as godmother.[3] Lady Anne's husband, Duke Humphrey, took it upon himself to bring the prince into the king's presence for the first time, beseeching Henry to bless his heir in front of his councillors. There was no response.[4]

Action was clearly needed and against the will of Somerset and the queen, the Council made the decision on 24 October to recall Richard, duke of York, to London, imploring him to arrive 'in al godely haste'.[5] As the kingdom's most senior nobleman, they had little choice. For Somerset, it was an unmitigated disaster. York's supporter, John Mowbray, duke of Norfolk and a maternal grandson of Joan Beaufort, used this opportunity to launch a blistering attack on his kinsman, accusing Somerset of treason for his part in losing Normandy. Norfolk's lengthy petition to the Council bemoaned the 'grete dishonneurs and losses' of recent times, perpetrated by the 'fals menes of som persones that have take on theym over grete authoritee in this royaume'.

If there was any doubt whom Norfolk was referring to, he made it abundantly clear by specifically holding Somerset as 'one of theym that ys gylty'. Norfolk's ire, almost certainly reflecting the opinion of York, also targeted unnamed lords who, 'for the grete bribes that the seyd Duc of Somerset hath promysed and yoven them, have turned

theyr hertys from the wey of trouth and of justice'. In conclusion, he pointed out that in many other realms, captains that lose towns or castles without an adequate defence 'be deede and beheded, and ther godes lost'.[6]

It was precisely the type of backlash Somerset had feared, compounded when he was seized and imprisoned in the Tower of London. It was a shocking reversal of fortunes for a man who had, until recently, possessed unparalleled influence over his king. He had escaped similar predicaments in the past, but generally through royal support and the nobility's hesitation to back York's radical reformist agenda. This time, the situation was different. The king was incapacitated and York could now count on the support of commanding magnates like Norfolk and the two Neville earls, Salisbury and Warwick.

Somerset languished in captivity throughout the Christmas period, although there is evidence he still maintained communication with the outside world. Letters were exchanged with his nephew James II of Scotland, for example, who had sent a messenger to his uncle enquiring about his condition. One of Somerset's responses suggests his imprisonment was done for his own safety, although from whom is not made clear:

> I thanke the Kynge of Scotts right hartely of the good love and affection that he hathe to me his uncle, as nature will that he shulde. Notwithstondinge, as for my beinge in the Tower of London, it was done by thadvyse of the lords of the Kyngs Counseyle, which, as I undarstand, was moaste for the swertye of my person.[7]

On 19 January 1454, meanwhile, a newsletter from John Stodeley suggested the captive duke had 'espies goyng in every Lordes house of this land, some ghone as freres, som as shipmen taken on the sea, and som in other wise, which reporte unto hym all that thei kun see or here touchyng the seid Duke'. Stodeley's report also described how Somerset's men had taken up all the lodgings surrounding the Tower,

including those in Thames Street, Mart-Lane, St Katherine's and Tower Hill, presumably to prevent any attempt to murder Beaufort, as had happened to Lord Saye in 1450 and Archbishop Sudbury during the Peasants' Revolt in 1381.[8] The duke may have had scores of enemies, but he still retained the affections of his faithful affinity.

In the king's absence conciliar governance was re-established, with York now directing policy in place of Somerset. Queen Margaret, however, was suspicious of the duke's intentions regarding the throne, and although there is no evidence York coveted a crown at this juncture, the distrustful queen was a product of her upbringing. Her father René of Anjou had spent much of his adulthood fighting for his inheritance and on more than one occasion was captured by his enemies, incurring financial ruin funding armies and paying ransoms. Of greater significance were the roles played by Margaret's mother Isabella of Lorraine and paternal grandmother Yolande of Aragon during her childhood; both women deputised for her father during his various absences, prompting Louis XI of France, Charles VII's eventual heir, to later muse that his grandmother Yolande had borne 'a man's heart in a woman's body'.[9] For Louis' cousin Margaret, who also counted female figures like Eleanor of Aquitaine and Empress Matilda among her ancestors, a woman ruling on behalf of her husband was logical, even natural. She was devoted to her husband, who had proven kind and faithful, and felt, with Somerset imprisoned, she was the only person capable of acting in the best interests of the king and their son Prince Edward.

In early 1454, therefore, Margaret launched a desperate attempt to take control of government, putting forward five articles she hoped would be passed by the Council, 'whereof the first is that she desireth to have the hole reule of this land'. The assertive queen also demanded the right to appoint the chancellor, treasurer and privy seal, as well as any ecclesiastic offices.[10] Unsurprisingly she was politely, but firmly, rebuffed. Fifteenth-century England, it seemed, was not ready for a female ruler, even if a temporary one. That Margaret was French, of course, did not help her cause, nor was the fact she was complicit in the contentious handover of Maine and

Anjou.

When parliament reconvened on 15 February 1454, a definite decision had to be made on the governance of the kingdom. It was six months since the king had fallen ill, with little indication he would return to his senses in the near future. On 15 March at Windsor Castle, the five-month-old Prince Edward was created prince of Wales and duke of Cornwall, formal recognition of his status as heir to the throne. The planned investiture was intended to reassure Margaret of her son's position, for on 27 March, 'by advice and assent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and of the Commonalty of England', the duke of York was nominated protector of England.[11]

York was careful to declare his appointment was at parliament's request rather than his, as he was nervous of inviting accusations he was unlawfully assuming royal authority. For good measure, Richard claimed he wasn't 'sufficient of my self, of wysdome, connyng nor habilitie, to take uppon me that wurthy name of Protectour and Defensour of this land',[12] although, despite such outward humility, he gladly accepted the role, and with it, control of the kingdom.

One of York's first acts was to appoint a new chancellor, an office left vacant by Cardinal Kemp's death in March. The man selected was his brother-in-law Richard Neville, earl of Salisbury, who took up the role on 2 April, emulating two of his maternal uncles, Thomas and Henry Beaufort, in the process.[13] Salisbury, and perhaps more so his son Warwick, was ambitious beyond measure, and the chancellorship vindicated the Nevilles' decision to associate themselves with the husband of Cecily Neville. York, for his part assumed the captaincy of Calais, which he stripped from Somerset, and recovered the lieutenancy of Ireland.[14]

There was little doubt York was now the most powerful figure in the realm, although, Somerset's ruin apart, he resolved to be an impartial protector, adopting a non-partisan stance to disputes and petitions while endeavouring to restore law and order. Those closely associated with the previous regime, such as the duke of Buckingham and the king's maternal Tudor half-brothers, were even included in

council meetings, developing a working relationship with York.

Of course, not everyone was enamoured of the new regime. Somerset was still incarcerated and the queen was grumbling at Windsor, while in the north, York's own son-in-law Henry Holland, duke of Exeter, attempted to rouse the populace against the Protector. Exeter felt he had been unfairly overlooked for the Protectorship in favour of his father-in-law, and found a captive audience for his frustrations in the Percy family, who similarly felt excluded in favour of the Nevilles, their northern rivals. York's response was firm; after numerous letters demanding Exeter desist from his seditious behaviour, he was apprehended on 24 July and imprisoned in Pontefract Castle.[15] With two Lancastrian-descended dukes in captivity, and the king still incapacitated, York's position was further secured and he took the opportunity to press ahead with his plan to have Somerset tried for treason.

On 28 July 1454, a letter was dispatched to Norfolk requesting his attendance at a council meeting on 28 October, where it was hoped he would 'justifie the said maters so by you purposed' against Somerset, allowing York's Council to 'procede in the said matters according to law and reason'. The summons was signed by Thomas Bourchier, the new archbishop of Canterbury, the bishops of Winchester and Ely, Somerset's cousin Salisbury, and lords Bourchier, Dudley and Grey. York's name was noticeably missing, but there can be little doubt his hand was guiding matters behind the scenes.[16] Knowledge of this summons may have prompted William Paston to write to his brother John that same month to report that Somerset was 'styll in prison, in worse case than he was'. It is unclear if this was referring to the duke's physical or political state, but either way, Somerset's position was clearly perilous.[17]

In any event, the October meeting came and went, and Somerset languished in captivity with no imminent prospect of freedom or trial. One can only imagine his frustration as he paced about his lodgings in the Tower, unsure of his destiny while York held sway across England. As he settled down for his second consecutive Christmas in the

claustrophobic confines of the royal fortress, Somerset may even have prayed for a holy miracle. Perhaps God was listening attentively to Edmund Beaufort, for on Christmas Day 1454, King Henry regained his senses as quickly as he had lost them.

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Henry's catatonic state lasted around fifteenth months, during which time York had firmly established his position, even initiating an extensive reform programme in November 1454 that reduced the royal household, much to Queen Margaret's chagrin. Now, the dazed king, overwhelmed by news of his son's birth and the imprisonment of Somerset and Exeter, resumed control of his kingdom, formally dismissing York as Protector on 9 February 1455 before stripping the infuriated duke of the lieutenancy of Ireland and captaincy of Calais. On 7 March, York's close ally Salisbury was also forced into resigning the chancellorship.

In any other reign, the king resuming control after a lengthy illness would have been considered a joyous occasion, but as events would show, in this case it proved to be the worst thing that could have happened to the people of England. York had grown accustomed to authority during his nine months in charge, as had the supporters who had risen with him, and the duke did not easily accept his sudden dismissal. He had tasted power and had little desire to let it go. Edmund Beaufort, on the other hand, had been freed from the Tower on 7 February and not only sought to regain his former pre-eminence, but to wreak vengeance on York. Clearly, both dukes could not be accommodated.

At a council meeting in Greenwich on 4 March, Somerset bitterly decried his lengthy incarceration of 'a year, ten weeks and more' to an audience that included most of the kingdom's clergy and nobility, including York himself. He defiantly declared he had been held 'without any reasonable ground or lawefull processe', adding how 'ther is noo lawfull cause or matier laufully proposed ayenst him'. Somerset was relentless, boldly announcing:

> If eny Persone wold Charge him with any thyng contrarie to his Trouth or Ligeance, he wold be redy at all tymes in due order of Lawe to Aunswere and do all thynge that a trewe Knight oweth to do according to Law and Knighthood.

In short, Somerset was willing to challenge any detractor to a trial of arms, a clear indication he wholeheartedly rejected accusations of treason against his king. A whole lot of trouble could have been averted had York stepped forward and accepted such a challenge. The king, for his part, declared Somerset to be 'his true and feithfull liegeman and cousin, and doone unto him right true, good, and pleasaunt service', before adding 'to the whiche noe persone said contrarie, willyng it were knowen and understand that he so taketh and reputeth him'.[18] In an instant, Edmund Beaufort had been formally, and very publicly, exculpated of any treasonous behaviour.

York's hesitation to have his rival tried and executed in the king's absence had backfired. Somerset was restored to his positions, while York was removed from the Council he had controlled for almost a year. It was clear the relationship between the two dukes was past salvaging, with the two men unable to co-exist. Neither man was willing to concede supremacy to the other. The king's response, indecisive as ever, was to bound both men over for 20,000 marks and, 'touching all actions, plaints, controversies, demands etc. between the parties', to set an arbitration date of 20 June 1455.[19]

York had other ideas, however. He retreated to his estates in the north and started plotting how to permanently remove Somerset from the king's side, because Somerset, as a Milanese ambassador noted, 'ruled as usual' since his release from the Tower.[20] Reasoning with a king unwilling to listen was no longer an option. Unlike in 1450 and 1452, York was no longer a lone voice; he was assured of support from the two Neville earls, who had also returned north with their kinsman. Salisbury and Warwick's decision to support York was as much about self-interest as it was with implementing the duke's plan for reform.

Relations between the Neville and Percy families had become severely strained in recent years, with both factions vying for supremacy in the north. The marriage of Eleanor, Ralph Neville and Joan Beaufort's daughter, to Henry Percy, 2nd Earl of Northumberland, had failed to resolve this. The rivalry turned violent in August 1454 after one of Salisbury's sons, Thomas Neville, married Maud Stanhope, heiress of her uncle Ralph Cromwell, 3rd Baron Cromwell. The Percys were affronted by the union for it raised the prospect of the Nevilles inheriting Wressle Castle, a traditional Percy stronghold presently in Cromwell's hands. The response of Thomas Percy, 1st Baron Egremont and Northumberland's second son, was to attack the Neville convoy at Heworth Moor near York as they were returning to Sheriff Hutton from the wedding. Although there were no recorded fatalities, the skirmish marked the moment the Percy-Neville feud turned decidedly deadly. From a Beaufort perspective, the Heworth incident marked the curious moment when a Percy grandson of Joan Beaufort had attacked her Neville son and grandsons. After a series of tit-for-tat attacks over the following year, the Nevilles avenged Heworth on 31 October 1454 when Thomas and Richard Percy were captured by Thomas Neville after another clash at Stamford Bridge. They were imprisoned in Middleham Castle.

Warwick, meanwhile, shared a common enemy with York, which helped solidify the burgeoning alliance between him and his uncle-by-marriage Edmund Beaufort. Warwick's enmity towards his Beaufort cousin stemmed chiefly from a dispute over the complicated division of the vast Despenser-Beauchamp inheritance, which encompassed several profitable lands concentrated in the Midlands, Welsh Marches and South Wales, and to which the pair were connected by a complex web of marriages. Somerset's wife Eleanor was one of three daughters of Richard Beauchamp, 13th Earl of Warwick, from his first marriage to Elizabeth Berkeley. After Elizabeth's death, the earl married Isabel Despenser, producing two more children, Henry and Anne, with the former inheriting his father's earldom in 1439 as the sole male heir, becoming the 14th Earl. Henry Beauchamp, raised to a duke in 1445, married into the Neville family through his union with Cecily, a

daughter of the earl of Salisbury, and upon his own death in 1446, the title and estates passed into the possession of their two-year-old daughter Anne, the 15th holder of the earldom. Like her father, Anne only held the Beauchamp inheritance for a short period, dying aged five years old.

There was some confusion over who should inherit the earldom and estates after Anne's death, for her father had three surviving elder half-sisters, including the Countess of Somerset, and one younger, full sister in another Anne, who had also married into the Neville family as wife of the younger Richard Neville. The decision to grant Richard the earldom was made in June 1449, and the new 16th Earl claimed possession of much of the Beauchamp estates, taking advantage of the fact Somerset was serving in Normandy and therefore unable to mount a challenge in person.

The Beaufort duke furiously protested the verdict when it was pronounced, initiating a bitter feud between the two men that only served to push Warwick towards York's welcoming embrace. In the summer of 1453, the king unwisely permitted Somerset to take custody of half the Despenser estate in the Lordship of Glamorgan, a provocative act that was naturally met with fierce resistance from Warwick. The earl was summoned before the Council on 21 July to answer allegations he had allowed 'grete gatherynges, congregacions and assembles unlaweful' in Cardiff and Cowbridge to face down Somerset's men, with an order to immediately desist.[21] The king had, in fact, been on his way to South Wales in August 1453 to personally assert his authority in the region when he fell ill in Wiltshire, leaving the land dispute unresolved and the bad blood between Warwick and Somerset to fester.

In the meantime, the royal court was planning to withdraw from London to Coventry for the summer and announced a Great Council to meet in Leicester on 21 May 1455 to discuss the recent political turmoil. York and his allies were hesitant about attending a summit in the centre of the Lancastrian heartland, anticipating the proceedings were an attempt to bring about their ruin rather than to impartially

arbitrate any dispute with Somerset. The duke of Gloucester had fallen victim to a trap at Bury St Edmunds in 1447, and York had no desire to become similarly ensnared. In any event, he had little intention of reconciling with his Beaufort rival, whom he was set on destroying once and for all.

York and the Nevilles rapidly assembled a force of around two thousand men by combining their considerable resources and together purposefully marched south, bypassing Leicester before setting up camp on 20 May near the Old North Road in Royston, Hertfordshire. The king, preparing to depart from Westminster to go to the Midlands with his court, was informed of the movement and dispatched orders for the duke and two earls to disband their force, tersely reminding Richard, in particular, of his public oath outside St Paul's three years earlier, which had included the specific promise never to 'gader any riottys or make any assemble of your people' without the king's consent.[22] The Yorkists reaffirmed their loyalty, but stubbornly defended their right to bear arms as protection against enemies who, they claimed, were poisoning the king's mind against them. Somerset, in particular, was once again denounced as a traitor.

Edmund Beaufort must have viewed events with a degree of trepidation, not only concerned for his political position, but perhaps even fearful for his life. Was it reasonable to expect the king to continue disregarding York's appeals for Somerset's arrest, particularly when York was willing to resort to arms to advance his cause? At what point did Henry cut his losses and consign his favourite servant to a fate like Suffolk's in 1450? Henry was a compliant monarch and if York could get word to the king, perhaps he could be convinced to sacrifice Somerset for the common good.

The opposite may have been true too, of course. There is nothing to suggest Henry was unwavering in his commitment to his Beaufort cousin, who could also count on the friendship of the queen, herself becoming a formidable ally. There was also little clamour among the lords in general for Somerset's removal, with dissent largely emanating from the commons and those few nobles who had flocked

to York's side. Somerset had already fended off several challenges from York, and although the latter's advancement south at the head of an army was the most serious yet, Edmund could be forgiven his arrogance. His supremacy, as always, depended on the king, and provided Henry didn't abandon his kinsman upon sight of York's army, Somerset's status as the leading royal councillor was secure.

On 21 May, the Yorkist army reached Ware, from where another letter was dispatched to the king, humbly addressing Henry as the 'moste Cristen Kyng, ryght high and myghty Prince, and our mooste redoubted souverayne Lord'. York was careful to avoid any language that could be construed as treasonous, although the sentiment was probably earnest; Richard was not intending to overthrow the king, but merely to remove Somerset and from Henry's presence. The letter expressed the Yorkists' annoyance, 'to our grettyst sorrow', that the court party led by Beaufort 'kepe theym self under the whyng of your Magestee Royall' at their expense, his 'true and humble liege men'. York implored the king to no longer 'geve trust of confidence unto the sinistrez, maliciouse and fraudulent laboures and rapports of our sayd ennemyes'.[23] It is not clear whether Henry ever saw the missive; Somerset, or another member of the duke's circle, could conceivably have intercepted the letter before it reached the impressionable king.

York and the Nevilles continued their march westwards and by the following morning, 22 May 1455, were camped to the east of St Albans, blocking the royal convoy from continuing on its journey. King Henry had left Westminster two days earlier with a fine array of nobles – apart from Somerset, he was accompanied by the duke of Buckingham, the earls of Pembroke, Northumberland, Devon, Stafford and Wiltshire and the lords Clifford, Dudley and Roos, among many other lesser knights and royal servants.

Travelling with Somerset was his eldest son Henry Beaufort, only around nineteen years old. It was presumably considered an ideal opportunity for the Beaufort heir to witness the inner workings of a large-scale royal progress and develop relations with other members of the court, not to mention the rare chance to enjoy an extended

break under his father's personal guidance. Unfortunately for the Beauforts, the 'fyre, rancour and envy' that had been brewing between York and Somerset was about to violently manifest itself, erupting in 'great and hote flamys of open warre and wrath'.[24] Thoughts of any companionship between father and son was put on the back burner the moment York appeared menacingly on the landscape.

With confrontation inevitable, the king charged Buckingham with visiting the Yorkist camp to beseech them to desist from any further aggression. Although York and Salisbury were his brothers-in-law, Buckingham's pleas went unheeded, with York himself declaring he had no plans to leave 'tyl he have them whych hav deserved deth, or elles we to dye therefore'. The king's retort to such defiant obstinacy was uncharacteristically fierce. 'I, King Herry', commanded that:

> no maner persone, of what degre, or state, or condicyon that evere he be, abyde not, but voyde the felde, and not be so hardy to make ony resystens ageyne me in myn owne realme; for I shall knowe what traytour dar be so bolde to reyse apepull in myn owne lond.

The penalties for the Yorkists, should they persevere with their course of action, was clear; Henry intended to 'destrye them every moder sone, and they be hanged, and drawen, and quartered'.[25]

It was a bold statement and may conceivably have originated from the distressed mind of Somerset rather than the usually passive monarch, who for all his supposed bluster, always preferred a peaceful outcome over violence. Nonetheless, the command was issued in Henry's name, and to ignore it was tantamount to treason. Additional steps were taken to defend the royal position, which included barricading the town with troops placed along the Tonman Ditch, separated the Lancastrians from the Yorkist camp, and appointing Buckingham to take command of the king's army, rather than Somerset who would have been a provocative choice. Considerable attention was also paid to the gateways on Sopwell and Shropshire Lanes, two narrow thoroughfares leading from the Yorkist camp into

the centre of the town. Pointedly, the king's banner was also raised near the royal tent on St Peter's Street, in the shadow of the church tower that gave the street its name.

The attack, when it came, was sudden, and devastated the ill-equipped Lancastrian force. York had grown frustrated by the lack of progress after three hours of fruitless discussions, so around eleven o'clock in the morning gave the order for his men to advance on the town, quickly filling the narrow streets and frantically hacking at the makeshift blockades manned by royal soldiers under the command of Lord Clifford. Although the barricades were enough to repel York and Salisbury, other sections of the eastern approach were crucially left unmanned, and the perceptive twenty-five-year-old earl of Warwick took advantage of the stretched Lancastrian resources by creeping through the back gardens with a small but hardy force of his best soldiers, avoiding detection until they reached the centre of the town.

As the core of the Lancastrian army ambled about in the Market Square and on St Peter's Street, many without their helmets or armour on, Warwick and his men pounced, 'sleying alle those that wythestood theym' as the frightened citizens scarpered in every direction to avoid the bloodshed.[26] Abbot Whethamstead later claimed he witnessed a man fall 'with his brains dashed out, there another with a broken arm, a third with a throat cut, and a fourth with a pierced chest', adding 'the whole street was full of dead corpses'.[27]

Somerset's heart surely sank at the sight of Warwick's men slashing their way through the royal troops and he frantically sought refuge in the Castle Inn. With little prospect of escape, and resigned to the likelihood that his capture would end in execution, Edmund courageously rallied and charged back out into the street, slaying several men with his sword before finally succumbing to the superior numbers. As a royal duke, Somerset was conspicuous in his costly armour, probably covered in a surcoat or tabard bearing his dynastic arms, those of the king bordered with blue and white segments. Around him, his closest retainers were easily identifiable by the blue and white woollen bends, or diagonal sashes, they bore, each

embroidered with Beaufort badges such as the portcullis and spotted panther. Those Beaufort symbols now represented a target for the soldiers who faced Somerset, lunging at the duke with their weapons until he fell in a blooded heap, according to Edward Hall, 'under the signe of the Castle'.[28]

Writing just under a century later, Hall mentioned the duke had been forewarned to 'eschew all Castles', drawing his information from the *English Chronicle,* written less than fifteen years after the battle and which recalled how Somerset 'had herde a fantastyk prophecy that he shuld dy undre a castelle'. While he had feared the royal fortress of Windsor as a result, of which he remained constable up until his death, it was in St Albans, where there was 'an hostry having the sygne of a castelle', that Somerset ultimately fell.[29] The prophecy was expanded upon in Shakespeare's play *Henry VI Part II* when a spirit recommended the duke shun castles, while in the nineteenth century it was further suggested he had consulted with the notorious 'Witch of Eye' Margery Jourdemayne, who similarly advised he would be slain near a castle.[30]

As news of Somerset's demise spread through the ranks, the fighting gradually ground to a halt, although not before Warwick had ordered his archers to fire towards the king's guard, injuring Buckingham in the process and leaving the king 'hurte with the shotte of an arrowe in the necke'.[31] The frantic attack barely lasted half an hour, by the end of which Henry Percy, 2nd Earl of Northumberland and Thomas, Lord Clifford, lay bloodied and lifeless alongside Somerset. Beaufort's teenage son Henry survived the slaughter, albeit 'sore hurt' and 'caryede hom in a cart'.[32] It was a resounding victory for the Yorkists, who had followed through on their threats to annihilate their principal foes in one fell swoop.

Edmund Beaufort spent his entire adulthood at the forefront of either war or politics, and often mired in both simultaneously. He had been a reasonably successful commander in France, capable of flourishing where two of his brothers had perished and a third was disgraced. His efforts in repelling Burgundian attacks on Calais in the

mid-1430s had seen him widely lauded, as had his recapture of Harfleur in October 1440. His nonexistent defence of Rouen and Caen in 1449 and 1450 had led to accusations of cowardice and incompetence from later historians, yet Somerset's daring military manoeuvres and willingness to lead raids into hostile territory seem at odds with such a characterisation.

If anything, his handover of the Norman cities was pragmatic rather than dishonourable; his brother John had been financially crippled by two decades of French imprisonment, and with a meagre inheritance sustaining a growing family, it was self-preservation rather than an innate weakness that prompted his swift surrender. Furthermore, it wasn't the action of a coward to actively fulfil the sizable void left by Suffolk's brutal murder in 1450. Somerset surely knew he would inevitably become the target of a disenfranchised nobility and unruly commons, yet persevered nonetheless, becoming constable of England and captain of Calais while functioning as *de facto* head of government. Such determined stubbornness, behaviour once characteristic of his uncle, Cardinal Beaufort, ultimately led to his downfall. Somerset's fateful error had been the perception of others, justified or otherwise, that he 'rewled the King and his reame as he wold'.[33] Royal favourites exercising considerable power in medieval England didn't often fare well.

If York's intention had been to kill Somerset, as seems likely, then on that May morning in 1455 he accomplished his goal in the bloodiest of circumstances. In death there would be no reprieve, no resurgence, no return to power for Edmund Beaufort. York had long tried, and failed, to politically ruin his rival, and eventually resorted to violence to achieve his objective, knowing that whatever his punishment, the deed was done. It was an outrageous, divisive and undeniably treasonous act, regardless of how the House of York later tried to justify the deed. York had consciously chosen to disregard the king's command and take the law into his own hands, although he wasn't acting alone. Salisbury and Warwick were also in a triumphant mood, for with the Percy patriarch also among the dead, their supremacy in the north would henceforth be unchallenged. The

morning after the battle, the jubilant trio marched to London with King Henry in tow. The message was clear; Henry remained king, but it was they who now governed the realm and dictated policy. The short-lived Beaufort ascendancy was over.

Although York and his Neville cohorts must take blame for how events unfolded at St Albans, their actions were partly the product of a weak king ruling for more than a decade without direction or conviction, allowing himself to become enchanted by successive councillors to the detriment of other, perhaps more deserving, individuals. By the spring of 1455, Henry VI was no longer a child, or even an inexperienced adolescent monarch, but a thirty-three-year-old man who had been king for most of his life. At the same age, his father had conquered Normandy while his grandfather had usurped a throne. Whereas Henry V and Henry IV had been courageous, military-minded leaders ruled by no one, their namesake descendant was inept, to say the least.

Henry VI may have been a kind, decent and devout man, but he was certainly not the authoritative ruler needed in a time of considerable turmoil. He failed to show any initiative in pursuing the war in France, upset several of his nobles by meddling with the cherished order of precedence, and crucially failed to show any political foresight when faced with several personal disputes between his highest-ranking magnates. A stronger king would have clamped down on York's haughty behaviour, while also ensuring councillors such as Suffolk and Somerset never overstepped their mark. Both friend and foe had taken advantage of the king's amenable and generous nature, and their gain was England's loss. St Albans' was merely the first in several pitched battles fought across the English landscape over the next thirty years, and it could all have been so easily avoided had Henry simply exercised greater personal accountability for his kingdom.

Edmund Beaufort had been the last living child of his father John Beaufort, the 1st Earl. Of his brothers, Henry had died at the Siege of Rouen in 1418, with Thomas passing away in 1431 and John in 1444.

His two sisters, Joan, queen of Scotland, and Margaret, countess of Devon, died in 1445 and 1449 respectively, although their Beaufort blood endured in their Stewart and Courtenay offspring.

Edmund's body was claimed by John of Whethamstead, the veteran abbot of St Albans Abbey, and the duke was quickly interred beneath the Lady Chapel, ironically within sight of the chantry of the Beauforts' great adversary, Humphrey of Gloucester. No tomb, effigy or plaque was provided for a man who had, for a period, governed England in all but name, although only two years later the three Yorkist leaders were ordered by the king to provide £45 a year to the abbey for Masses to be perpetually sung for the souls of those they had so ruthlessly butchered.[34]

For the next generation of Beauforts, represented by Edmund's substantial brood and John's heiress Lady Margaret, the future was uncertain, with an implacable enemy of their family in control of the king and capably supported by two Neville earls who, ironically, possessed Beaufort blood in their veins. The only conceivable option available to them was to regroup, rebuild and attempt to slowly recover their family's erstwhile position. Perhaps, in time, Edmund's sons could even avenge the House of York for the way their father had been cornered and cut down under the sign of the Castle Inn. It would not be forgotten. It could not be forgiven.

Plague of Division
1456–1460

Events at St Albans utterly devastated the Beaufort affinity. Their leader, the man they looked to for guidance and protection, had been massacred in the street, while his nineteen-year-old heir Henry Beaufort, the new duke, was severely wounded. The nature of Henry's injuries are not clear, but were sufficient for him to require a cart to carry him away from the bloody scene of battle. He did, however, make a full recovery, and in time would ride once again at the head of an army.

As the young duke, by the law of the land, was a minor in 1455, he was taken into the care of his cousin Warwick after St Albans, entrusted to the instrument of his father's death.[1] Henry had little say in the matter, and judging from his later actions, one doesn't imagine him being a submissive ward. A provocative Bill was passed by the Yorkist-controlled parliament on 18 July 1455 which placed blame for St Albans on Edmund Beaufort, justifying York's ambushing of the royal army in the process. The Act, expressed in the name of the compliant king, accused Beaufort, with two lesser figures named Thomas Thorpe and William Joseph, of intending to cause 'the hurte and destruction of oure true right trusty and well beloved Cousyns', namely the Yorkist leaders. The act also claimed Beaufort, who 'provoked and stirred' Henry VI against York, concealed the duke's letters before the battle, impeding any genuine attempt at peace by obstructing Richard from the 'favour and good grace' of his king.[2]

Edmund Beaufort was unable to defend himself after death and any erstwhile allies were unwilling to speak up for him against York, now unchallenged as the dominant figure in English politics. For good measure, Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, a long-time adversary of the Beauforts before his death, was declared a true liege man of the king,

while the Yorkist commanders were formally pardoned of any wrongdoing for St Albans. The assassination of Somerset therefore went unpunished. Before parliament was dissolved, York and the Nevilles swore an oath to serve and protect the king, conveniently forgetting the neck wound Henry VI suffered during the climax of the recent battle. Whereas the king appeared admirably forgiving, young Henry Beaufort seethed in rage. History was being decidedly rewritten, or at least twisted, by the victors, and there was little he could do about it.

The new duke of Somerset was further infuriated when his father's offices were redistributed among those responsible for his death. Warwick was nominated for the captaincy of Calais in August, while York received the constableship of England. The latter even took some of Edmund Beaufort's lesser offices, such as the constableship of Carmarthen and Aberystwyth castles in west Wales. The constableship of Windsor, meanwhile, was assumed by Salisbury's brother William, Lord Fauconberg. Finally, in November York was reappointed Protector.[3] The Yorkist coup appeared complete.

Henry Beaufort's enforced tenure under Warwick's guardianship, however, much like York's protectorship, proved to be short-lived. As the king was not physically or mentally incapacitated as before, York's authority to rule was undermined, while his support of the commons' petition for an extensive Act of Resumption proved unpopular with his fellow lords. On 25 February 1456, at the prompting of his nobles and with the duchy of Lancaster revenues, and the colleges at Eton and Cambridge threatened with seizure, King Henry returned to parliament, his presence triggering York's resignation as Protector. Richard remained chief councillor, but any influence he had wielded diminished considerably thereafter. We can assume Somerset was returned to the care of his mother Eleanor around this period, for on 8 March, the dowager duchess was granted £200 a year from the royal exchequer for the sustenance of her son during the final year of his minority.[4]

Even after thirty-four years of rule, Henry VI remained a docile

observer when it came to government, with responsibility for upholding the Lancastrian regime gradually assumed by his queen. At Margaret's instigation, the royal court again withdrew from London in August 1456, completing a tactical retreat to the Midlands that had been interrupted at St Albans the previous year. Young Somerset, eager to fill the void left by his father's demise, pledged his loyalty to Margaret, and found a kindred spirit in Henry Holland, the impetuous duke of Exeter who had rejected his father-in-law York's authority in 1454 and led a northern rebellion.

Once the court was settled, a Great Council was scheduled for 10 October in Coventry, deep in the Lancastrian heartland. Somerset arrived heavily armed for his first significant political assembly, presumably preparing to confront York, Warwick and Salisbury. Unwisely, however, it was the town watch Somerset provoked, with a 'gret affray' erupting between the two groups to the 'gret disturbance of alle the Lords' in the vicinity'. The fighting, which left two or three watchmen dead, only ceased after alarm bells were rung in panic, prompting the veteran duke of Buckingham, with far greater military resources than either side, to intervene and calm the outraged citizens before they overwhelmed Somerset's meagre entourage.[5] It is unclear just how the volatile young duke managed to stir up such trouble in a town sympathetic to the Lancastrian cause. Barely twenty years old, Henry was still inexperienced in leadership, his judgement perhaps impaired by an all-consuming hated for the Yorkists.

Somerset didn't heed his lesson. At the council meeting itself he had to be restrained from physically attacking York, while in December the duke encountered Warwick's younger brother John Neville in London, with 'dyscencyon and unkyndenesse' arising between the pair. The mayor was keen to avoid any violence in his city, and ordered his men to patrol the streets to ensure nothing untoward happened.[6]

Henry Beaufort's confrontational behaviour was becoming a nuisance, and unbecoming in a senior peer. It also threatened to derail any genuine attempt to reconcile the kingdom's warring nobles.

Having witnessed his father's death, however, and having been severely injured himself, could Somerset be blamed for wanting instant retribution? Of course, the Yorkists were hardly innocent themselves; in August 1456, two of York's retainers, William Herbert and Walter Devereux, besieged and imprisoned the king's half-brother, and Somerset's cousin by marriage, Edmund Tudor, at Carmarthen Castle; the earl of Richmond died in uncertain circumstances a few months later. It seems plausible Somerset's attempt to get at John Neville was in part prompted by Tudor's demise.

There seemed little the king and council could do, but they attempted to placate the impetuous young duke on 1 March 1457 when, being 'nearly of full age', Somerset was authorised to assume possession of his estates 'without proof of age'.[7] One of his first actions was to relinquish his inherited interest in Cardinal Beaufort's almshouse in Winchester, which he resigned to Bishop William Waynflete, having little time to be concerned with the charitable endeavours of his great-uncle.[8] On 26 September, meanwhile, Somerset was handed his first commission of array for Southampton and the surrounding area, while on 14 October he received the constableship of Carisbrooke Castle and the lieutenancy of the Isle of Wight, both offices once held by his father.[9] These military appointments, Somerset's first, were in response to the destructive French raid on Sandwich in August, with Henry now charged with overseeing the protection of the Dorset coast from further attacks.

Not that these grants succeeding in distracting Edmund Beaufort's heir from attempting to avenge his father's death, however. On one of Warwick's sojourns in London, on 5 November 1457, Somerset, with Exeter, Shrewsbury and his elder half-brother Thomas Ros, 9th Baron de Ros, attempted to apprehend the mighty earl. Warwick proved evasive, however, having 'purveied a remedy against their malice', and slipped away unmolested.[10] Somerset was clearly struggling to put St Albans behind him, and it was Warwick, his former guardian, he primarily held accountable.

Tensions around the court continued to simmer through the

winter, prompting a determined, if bizarre, effort by King Henry to summon his nobility to London in March 1458 to resolve the lingering feuds dividing his realm and to 'eradicate the roots of rancour' between the victims and victors of St Albans.[11] Thousands of armed troops subsequently filled the capital's streets, conspicuously arrayed in the livery of their respective lords, themselves magnificently clad in costly cloth of gold and precious gems. The king himself was protected by 13,000 archers, which naturally alarmed the nervous citizens of London.

Although the Yorkists arrived peaceably, lured by royal safe conducts, the city authorities had their work cut out maintaining order. Somerset had reached the city gates as early as 31 January, heading a force which comprised 800 hundred soldiers and 200 horses.[12] His anticipated entry was blocked, however, as it was clear the duke, contrary to the king's wishes, intended to wage war against those complicit in the death of his father. Finding accommodation in the Temple Bar area, just outside the city walls, Somerset wasn't alone; Exeter provided considerable backup, while the new earl of Northumberland, his brother Egremont and Lord Clifford were similarly keen to confront the Yorkists, having also lost their fathers at St Albans. Their antagonistic presence forced the mayor Geoffrey Boleyn, great-grandfather of the future queen, to dispatch armed troops throughout the city to ensure the two factions didn't come to blows.[13]

Despite such obvious division, King Henry nonetheless insisted on peace, and after a series of intense negotiations announced on 24 March that a truce had been agreed with both York and the Beauforts bound over for 10,000 marks each to keep the peace.[14] Furthermore, on 14 May, the king ordered York to transfer a royal debt of 5,000 marks to the Beauforts, with half intended for Somerset and half to be divided between his mother and siblings.[15] The three Yorkist leaders were also ordered to endow St Albans Abbey with £45 a year to pray for the souls of those they had killed. Although outwardly a victory for the Beauforts, the debts proved difficult to recover and it seems likely the family never received the full settlement.

The morning after the truce, which was the Feast of the Annunciation and known in England as Lady Day, the proud king led a procession through the streets of London towards St Paul's Cathedral. Following were Queen Margaret and Richard of York, the bitter enemies awkwardly holding hands in a contrived display of friendship, while Somerset similarly joined hands with Salisbury, and Exeter with Warwick. Despite Henry's optimism, it would take considerably more than holding hands in public to eradicate three years of acrimony, with Edward Hall later dramatically noting that while 'their mouths lovingly smiled', their 'corages were inflamed with malice'.[16] The king's intentions were noble, but his execution flawed, and the parade only served to emphasise that two separate factions were desperately vying for control of the kingdom.

Loveday, as the event became known, changed nothing. Regardless of any bonds or settlements, and in direct defiance of his sovereign, Somerset remained fixated on vengeance, while York continued to be excluded from power and overlooked for royal office. The violence also continued; in October 1458, Warwick was attacked by several royal cooks armed with spits after returning from a council meeting in Westminster and, just like Edmund Beaufort a few years earlier, the earl was forced to flee via the Thames.[17] There is no evidence of Henry Beaufort's connection with the attempting lynching, but considering his recent animosity towards Warwick, it wouldn't be surprising if Somerset had covertly conveyed orders to assassinate his adversary. Less than four years had passed since St Albans, but it was clear to all, perhaps except the witless king, that the bloodshed had not finished. As the *Croyland* chronicler wisely observed, an 'unhappy plague of division' was spreading through English society, one which could not be healed.[18]

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By 1459, Henry Beaufort was an established member of the court party, as prominent around the English king as his father, grandfather and great-uncles had been before him. The duke of Somerset

represented the third generation of Beaufort men serving the House of Lancaster, although in his case that service had thus far been dissapated by all-consuming thoughts of avenging his father. There is little to suggest Somerset, now aged around twenty-three, had developed into a proficient administrator in the guise of his namesake great-uncle, while his failed attempts to ambush the Yorkists suggest his military capabilities were still raw. Several opportunities to prove himself on the field of battle were, however, to present themselves over the next few years.

Animosity between the two factions continued to escalate throughout early 1459, with the royal court again withdrawing to the safety of the Midlands. Another Great Council was summoned in June, but York, noting the likelihood he was to be indicted for treason, declined to attend, preferring to raise his troops and beckon Salisbury and Warwick to his side at Ludlow in the Welsh March. It was the third time York had raised a force within a decade. Somerset, meanwhile, based in the West Country, was busy raising his own forces, possibly at the bidding of the queen, and marched northwards to meet up with the royal army. A confrontation of some kind seemed inevitable.

On 21 September 1459, Somerset was lurking near Coleshill in Warwickshire, about twelve miles north-west of Coventry, when Warwick appeared in the vicinity, on his way to link up with York at Ludlow. Incredibly, the two armies failed to engage, and continued on their separate journeys.[19] Considering Somerset's desire to destroy Warwick, is it possible he assessed his opponent's hardy force and baulked at attacking it? Only two days later, Warwick's father Salisbury encountered a more aggressive Lancastrian army under the command of Lord Audley near Blore Heath in Staffordshire, and in a 'sore and dreadfull' skirmish, fought his way through a superior force containing many of the queen's own retainers. With Audley among the dead, Salisbury's fate was sealed. There could be no turning back for Joan Beaufort's eldest son.[20]

With the two Neville earls reaching the duke of York with no

further incident, all three Yorkist leaders congregated at Ludford Bridge, across the River Teme from Ludlow, on 9 October. Then the royal army appeared on the horizon. As well as the king and queen, present among the formidable force were the dukes of Exeter and Buckingham, the earls of Northumberland, Arundel, Devon, Shrewsbury and Wiltshire, plus an implacable Somerset.

When news reached York's camp that King Henry was not only present but uncharacteristically wearing armour, the duke's demoralised army disintegrated, particularly once the royal standard was raised. To oppose the king on a field of battle was simply treason. York desperately sent a letter to his 'Most Crystyne kyng' the following day, claiming he desired an amicable resolution that, without hint of irony, wouldn't result in the 'effusione of Crysten blood'.[21] He was ignored. Henry, who had been remarkably lenient with the duke on previous occasions, was no longer inclined to negotiate.

On 12 October, Warwick's Calais soldiers, under the command of Andrew Trollope, defected under the cover of nightfall, taking with them invaluable military intelligence of York's operation. Only three days earlier, Somerset had been appointed captain of Calais in place of Warwick,[22] and it raises the question of whether this had any bearing on the soldiers' decision to desert the man they had accompanied into England. Calais had long been affiliated with the Beauforts, with some of the men having possibly served Somerset's father. Trollope, meanwhile, had served in France under Somerset's uncle John Beaufort on the 1440 campaign. Once informed part of their army had defected, and unwilling to compromise, the rebel leaders fled their camp; York and his second son Edmund, earl of Rutland, headed through Wales for Ireland, while his eldest son Edward, earl of March, and the two Neville earls made for Calais. An unprotected Ludlow was subsequently sacked, and York's captured duchess, Cecily Neville, was placed in the custody of her sister Anne, the duchess of Buckingham, a bittersweet reunion for Joan Beaufort's daughters who found themselves on opposing sides of an increasingly ferocious political divide.[23]

It was an astonishing turn of events. The Yorkists had, quite literally, been chased out of England. Yet the Lancastrian regime, with the queen at its head, was not finished. Writs were issued summoning all lords to a parliament in Coventry on 20 November, with York, Salisbury and Warwick noticeably excluded. Dubbed the Parliament of Devils by later Yorkist commentators, the proceedings were focused on crushing York's affinity, and in their absence the three leaders were attained with their prestigious titles and vast lands forfeited to the cash-strapped crown to be redistributed among loyal royal supporters. Salisbury's attainder, in particular, undid the considerable efforts of Joan Beaufort in ensuring her children inherited the Neville patrimony.

Two of those who benefitted from the fallout were Somerset and his mother Eleanor, granted an annuity of 400 marks each on 22 January 1460 to be drawn from the forfeited south-west estates of York. The grant was made after the duchess complained to the king that, contrary to his earlier command to pay the Beauforts 5,000 marks, York had 'paid them nothing'.[24] At the end of the parliament, each lord present was forced to reaffirm their fealty to the king, and most tellingly, to young Prince Edward. Was there a concern that York, with nothing to lose, would now put forward his own dynastic claim to the crown, with the oaths intended to discourage further disloyalty?

In the meantime, Somerset absented himself from England and pursued the Nevilles and March to Calais, where he intended to wrest control of the garrison from Warwick. Although bolstered by Trollope's soldiers from Ludford, and the presence of his elder half-brother Thomas Ros, Somerset was blocked from entering the port. Under pressure from persistent cannon fire, he retreated to nearby Guînes where a promise to pay the garrison its overdue wages opened the gates. Somerset's appointment as captain of Calais had probably provoked considerable joy in the Beaufort duke, for it was an office held by both his father and grandfather. However, Calais was notoriously difficult to capture, as generations of Frenchmen and Burgundians could attest, and when Somerset approached brandishing

his letters patent and declaring it was the king's will that the town submit to the duke, his pleas went unheeded.[25] Driven by his hated for Warwick, Somerset stubbornly persevered and launched almost daily raids on Calais, particularly after he was confirmed as the town's captain for a period of twelve years on 31 January 1460.[26]

The Yorkists weren't inactive themselves, however, and launched regular piracy raids in the Channel while dispatching messages to York in Ireland. One such raid on Sandwich in Kent during January obliterated part of a royal fleet preparing to sail to Somerset in Guînes, while several Lancastrian commanders, Richard Wydeville, Lord Rivers, his son Anthony, and Thomas, Lord Scales, were captured and taken back to Calais where they were subjected to a furious tirade by the three Yorkist leaders. Ironically, the earl of March would marry Rivers' daughter Elizabeth only four years later. Other ships captured by Warwick, meanwhile, often resulted in the executions of any troops he suspected of deserting the Yorkists at Ludford Bridge. To fight for Henry Beaufort in this Channel campaign could literally mean life or death.

By March 1460, Warwick felt confident enough to temporarily leave Calais and sail to Ireland to liaise with York in person, where plans were likely finalised for their return to England, and possibly even their intentions regarding the crown. In the earl's absence, Somerset launched a final concerted attempt to capture the port. Although part of the duke's fleet was annihilated during the Sandwich raid, he nonetheless roused the Guînes garrison and headed north until encountering a Yorkist force on 23 April at Pont de Neullay.

In the clash that followed, Warwick's Calais garrison overwhelmed their Guînes counterparts, killing many of Somerset's men before forcing the duke into retreat. This bloody, and strategically crucial, skirmish is often overlooked by later historians, yet a different outcome could have significantly altered the course of English history. If the Calais garrison had been soundly defeated, depriving Warwick of his most proficient soldiers, would subsequent events have unfolded as they did? Henry Beaufort, with a bit more luck and a stronger

army, could have halted the Wars in their infancy if he had been victorious.[27]

As it transpired, Somerset's resources were strained by the setback, and he could only look on in frustration as Warwick returned to Calais in May and started preparing his forces for an invasion of the mainland. A council order on 23 May for Beaufort retainers Osbert Mountford and John Baker to prepare 200 men-at-arms and archers 'to resist the king's rebels and enemies' was too little, too late.[28] Warwick could not be stopped, and another raid was launched on Sandwich on 24 June during which Mountford was captured. Much to Somerset's dismay, his captain was taken back to Calais and beheaded.[29] Two days later, the three Yorkist earls, Warwick, Salisbury and March, departed for England at the head of an army numbering around two thousand. Their goal was clear: to seize the king, physically removing him from the influence of the queen and her affinity, and to govern indefinitely his name.

With York and his second son Rutland remaining in Ireland for the moment, the three earls marched through Kent and London, with Warwick continuing onwards into the Midlands, his army swelling with followers along the way. The Lancastrians, having learnt of the advance, assumed a defensive position near Delapré Abbey, just south of the River Nene from Northampton. Warwick sent word that he wished to speak directly to King Henry, a request rebuffed by Humphrey, duke of Buckingham, who again assumed command of the royal army alongside Shrewsbury and Baron Grey de Ruthyn. As at St Albans, the impatient Warwick was not a man given to incessant negotiation, and on 10 July, having twice more been denied access to the king, the earl attacked Grey's detachment in the heavy rain. Rather than stand their ground, Grey's men simply downed their weapons in the mud and allowed Warwick's men to pass through. Within half an hour, the battle was over. Buckingham, Shrewsbury and the barons Egremont and Beaumont were slain, with many more Lancastrian soldiers drowned in the river while attempting to flee.[30]

Of greater concern to the surviving Lancastrian leadership was the

capture of the king, who had been left alone in his royal tent, seemingly oblivious to his chaotic surroundings. Warwick's mission was accomplished, and with relative ease. One can only wonder how the Neville sisters, Cecily and Anne, received the news. For Cecily, as duchess of York, Northampton raised hopes she would soon be reunited with her husband and sons, while for Anne, with her husband Buckingham killed fighting her nephew Warwick, it was she who now faced an uncertain future. For Joan Beaufort's two daughters, Fortune's wheel could be both generous and cruel.

When Somerset was briefed about the battle in Guînes, he assessed his situation. His finances were dwindling, as were his men and ships. The Yorkists, by contrast, still controlled Calais and now had the king in their custody. His position appeared hopeless, and on 5 August 1460 orders were unsurprisingly dispatched from London, apparently with the king's authority, for the Beaufort duke to deliver Guînes to Warwick.[31] A resigned Somerset duly abandoned his garrison but, rather than surrender himself, fled into France alongside his half-brother Ros to seek refuge. The duke was granted a safe conduct from Charles VII, despite the king's acrimonious dealings the Beauforts in the past, and Somerset was given accommodation in Montivilliers. His time in France wasn't completely wasted, for Henry developed a useful friendship with Charles, count of Charolais and the Burgundian heir, cultivated during a lavish feast in Ardres on 12 August. Nonetheless, while Somerset was an exile dependent on the generosity of his French hosts, Richard of York was preparing to proceed with the second phase of his conspiracy to seize control of England.

Like Henry of Bolingbroke in 1399, York was faced with a decision to either accept his attainder and exile for life, or to come out fighting. Again, like Bolingbroke, he chose the latter path. After learning of Warwick's victory at Northampton, York departed for the mainland, landing in North Wales on 9 September, before pointedly marching through England bearing the arms of his great-great-grandfather Lionel of Antwerp, the elder brother of King Henry's own ancestor, John of Gaunt. He entered London on 10 October at the head of a magnificent, almost regal, procession, timing his arrival to coincide

with the parliament that had convened to repeal anti-Yorkist legislation passed in Coventry a year earlier. Dramatically interrupting proceedings at Westminster Palace, York walked straight to the dais, placing his hand on the empty throne, confirming his intentions for the throne. Rather than rapturous applause of support, however, the presumptuous duke was greeted with confused silence from the 'sore dismaide' onlookers, none of whom apparently wanted to depose their anointed king. The reaction couldn't have been more different than that which greeted Bolingbroke sixty years earlier.[32]

The obstinate duke refused to concede defeat, and even took to residing in Henry's royal apartments at Westminster. An intense series of negotiations followed, with a compromise finally reached on 25 October 1460 known as the Act of Accord. Henry was to retain his throne for life, but upon his death the crown would pass into the Yorkist line. In the meantime, York would not only be appointed Protector for the third time, but was also named prince of Wales, duke of Cornwall and earl of Chester, titles traditionally reserved for the heir apparent. To Queen Margaret's absolute horror, her beloved son Edward had been disinherited and cast aside without a second thought. The irony of the Lancastrians forfeiting a throne in the same manner they had gained one forty years earlier in France wouldn't have been lost on astute political observers. Margaret, however, would not – and in truth *could* not – accept the pronouncement, and her resolve to destroy York hardened. The factional discord between the warring parties had, for the first time, turned decidedly dynastic.

For Somerset and his Beaufort kin, including his younger brothers Edmund and John, this was a disastrous development, for which their Beaufort-blooded Neville relations were largely responsible. The family had always depended on the patronage of a friendly Lancastrian king, and with that support about to be withdrawn they stood at the mercy of a hostile Yorkist regime led by the eponymous duke himself, now the king-in-waiting. Any place the Beauforts had in the Lancastrian line of succession, however unlikely it was it would ever be realised, was also rescinded. The Act of Accord was the greatest threat the family had ever faced as a collective unit.

Everything the Beauforts had accumulated over three generations, whether offices, estates or simply royal influence, was threatened – including their lives.

For Kingdom and Life
1460–1461

Margaret of Anjou was a proud woman, remarkably dedicated to her son Edward and loath to stand idly by while the prince was removed from the succession. Unfairly portrayed by Yorkist commentators as a ruthless warmonger who unnaturally dominated her meek husband, Margaret suffered xenophobic and misogynistic prejudice and was roundly criticised for deviating from the courtly behaviour expected from a queen consort.

In fact, there is little evidence that Margaret imposed herself on political matters at all before the king's illness rendered it necessary. Instead she trusted royal favourites such as Suffolk or Somerset to guide her husband. Contrary to later accusations, it wasn't Margaret who led England into civil war; rather she merely responded to attacks on her character, her child's status and her husband's crown with a courage lacking in her frustratingly passive royal spouse.

Margaret wasn't alone in opposing the Act of Accord, nor in wanting to restore Lancastrian supremacy after their capitulation at Northampton. With her precious son in tow, the queen fled west to Harlech Castle after the battle, seeking temporary shelter with the king's half-brother Jasper Tudor, earl of Pembroke. Then she sailed on to Scotland, where she found a sympathetic audience in Mary de Guelders, the widowed queen of the Beaufort-descended James II.

The duke of Exeter, the earls of Northumberland, Wiltshire and Westmorland and the lords Clifford, Roos and Dacre were among those openly pledging their support. Foremost among these Lancastrian devotees was the relentless Henry Beaufort. Having fled into France in August 1460, the duke of Somerset bided his time until the opportunity presented itself for his return to England. By 12 October he had moved to Dieppe on the Norman coast with Andrew

Trollope and some soldiers from the Guînes garrison,[1] and after having gradually cultivated the support of Charles VII, he was provided several ships to cross the Channel. His chosen destination was Dorset, strongly associated with the Beaufort dynasty and notably the location of the family seat at Corfe Castle.

At the bidding of the queen, who 'prayde hem to com to hyr as hastely as they myght',[2] Somerset wasted little time in mobilising his finest troops from the Beaufort estates and, having linked up with his cousin Thomas Courtenay, earl of Devon, in Exeter, headed north on a gruelling trek towards Hull, almost three hundred miles away. Presuming they marched between fifteen and twenty miles a day, this was a mammoth undertaking in the bleak winter months when food and resources could be scarce. They passed through Bath, Cirencester, Evesham and Coventry, probably following the Fosse Way, the Roman route, before crossing the Trent at Newark and joining the Great North Road. They soon discovered they weren't the only army using that route.

By the start of December, Richard of York had been notified of a Lancastrian army assembling in the north and decided to personally confront the threat, accompanied by his son Rutland and brother-in-law Salisbury. It was inevitable the controversial Act of Accord, roundly rejected by Lancastrian loyalists, would be challenged on the battlefield, and the first skirmish between the factions occurred shortly after their paths briefly crossed on 16 December near Worksop in Nottinghamshire. Although most of the chronicles are silent on the encounter, suggesting it wasn't a large-scale clash worthy of comment, William Worcester noted some of York's men were killed by Somerset's troops, although it isn't clear if the dukes themselves witnessed events.[3]

The main Yorkist body reached Sandal Castle near Wakefield just before Christmas and sought shelter in York's large stone fortress while awaiting reinforcements from his son, Edward of March. It didn't take long for Somerset and Devon to catch up, however, and the Lancastrian commanders, bolstered by the arrival of Northumberland,

Clifford and several other northern lords, surrounded the castle in preparation for a siege. The tense standoff came to a sudden climax on 30 December 1460, when York, for reasons that have never been satisfactorily ascertained, incautiously emerged from behind Sandal's robust walls and crossed its deep moat.

Traditional thought suggests a Yorkist foraging party was ambushed by Somerset, prompting the affronted duke to ride to their aid, while it has also been opined York misidentified a Lancastrian detachment under Anthony Trollope's command to be that of Warwick's, belatedly arriving from London. An account in the contemporary *English Chronicle* perhaps offers the most compelling evidence for events on that fateful day. The chronicler suggests the duke was deceived by John Neville, Westmorland's brother, who advanced on Sandal pledging his loyalty to the Protector and requesting a commission to raise troops to fight the Lancastrian aggressors. York consented, and possibly left Sandal unaware Neville was, in fact, an adherent of Somerset's.[4]

The duke had barely left the shadow of his fortress when he was suddenly set upon from every conceivable direction. Somerset, Northumberland and his supposed ally Neville launched a frontal attack, while Exeter and Ros advanced from the flanks. Clifford, meanwhile, covered the rear, blocking the route back into the castle. Outmanoeuvred, outnumbered and out-thought, York was surrounded on every side 'like a fish in a net or a deere in a buckestall',[4] and in the melee that followed was utterly overwhelmed and routed. It was a crushing victory for the Lancastrians, and in particular for a triumphant Henry Beaufort, his credentials boosted as a military tactician. In eliminating the proud duke of York, Somerset had succeeded where his father had failed – and in devastating fashion.

With several soldiers present at Wakefield who had lost their fathers at St Albans five years earlier, the death of York wasn't merely political for the Lancastrians, but payback of a very personal nature. Nowhere was this more evident than in the callous murder York's seventeen-year-old son Edmund, earl of Rutland, as he attempted to

flee the bloodshed. Rutland was cornered on Wakefield Bridge by Lord Clifford, who avenged his father's death by slaying the teenager where he stood. Salisbury, meanwhile, was captured shortly after the battle, and rather than being summarily executed, was imprisoned in Pontefract Castle on Somerset's orders. Although it was anticipated the earl would pay a significant ransom for his freedom, the locals, 'whyche loved hym nat', thought otherwise. The sixty-year-old earl, the eldest son of Joan Beaufort, was dragged from his cell and crudely beheaded outside the castle.[6] It was an ignominious end for a man who had habitually ruled the north like a second king.

Having eliminated two of the three men responsible for St Albans, Somerset and his emboldened army continued north to York where they were met by Queen Margaret, who had moved south from Scotland after learning of York's death. Together, the Lancastrian lords reaffirmed their desire to restore Prince Edward as heir of Henry VI, prompting Francesco Coppini, Bishop of Terni and a Papal Legate closely associated with Warwick, to write to the queen imploring her to desist before she wrought 'desolation upon the whole realm'. Coppini also made passing reference to Somerset, who he admired 'for his character', suggesting Henry Beaufort was grudgingly respected even among those he bitterly opposed.[7] The bishop's efforts, however, were to no avail. On 21 January 1461, after the heads of York, Salisbury and Rutland were spiked upon Micklegate Bar, several peers formally pledged their fealty to the 'most excellente princesse Marguerite Qwene of England' and the 'moost high and myghti prince Henry the Vjte'. In addition to 'Somerset H.', other noteworthy signatories of a council record confirming their loyalty included Exeter, Northumberland, Westmorland, Devon, the lords Neville, FitzHugh, Roos and Dacre, and the bishops of Carlisle and Coventry.[8]

It was a formidable array of noblemen willing to die for Lancaster, and at York, their mutual oaths of fidelity solidified a bond that had grown into brotherhood over recent months. Events at Wakefield, however, merely roused the rage of Warwick and March, who, much like the Lancastrians after St Albans, now sought their own revenge for their fathers. Warwick wrote to the pope on 11 January 1461,

defiantly declaring ‘all will end well’.[9] It was an ominous warning for Somerset and his associates. It could no longer be ignored that England was in a state of civil war, from which only one king of England could emerge. The question was, which one?

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The deaths of York and Salisbury proved to be a gift and a curse for the House of Lancaster. Although both men had unquestionably sown the seeds of rancour with their disruptive behaviour over the previous decade, their removal only served to hasten the rise of York’s precocious eldest son, Edward. The eighteen-year-old earl of March, and duke of York since his father’s demise, cut an impressive figure; he was tall, around six feet four inches, with a charming nature that belied a robust soldier’s temperament. In his cousin Warwick, Edward had a willing companion determined to do whatever it took to satisfy their boundless ambition. There could be no reconciliation.

While York had marched north, Edward manned the family estates in the Welsh March to prevent King Henry’s Tudor half-brother Pembroke from uniting his Welsh troops with Somerset’s in Yorkshire. Despite his tender years, Edward proved more than capable as a military commander and inflicted a catastrophic defeat on Pembroke at Mortimer’s Cross on 2 February 1461. If Jasper Tudor’s army had succeeded in reaching Somerset’s camp, then the Lancastrian army may have become insuperable.

Margaret and Somerset learnt about Mortimer’s Cross while marching south towards London, harrying and plundering Yorkist estates as they passed through Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire. The queen’s predominantly northern force was bolstered by Scottish recruits, and news of their exploits spread fear among Londoners, concerned they would be ‘robbed and dispoyled’ once the army entered the capital.[10] Warwick gathered his troops in response, and supported by Norfolk, Suffolk and Arundel, awaited their arrival near St Albans, the scene of the devastating Lancastrian defeat in 1455. For Somerset, Northumberland and Clifford, sons of those killed at the

first battle, there couldn't have been a more fitting location to settle scores against Warwick, the architect of that victory.

On 17 February 1461, the Lancastrians tactically outwitted Warwick, and after hours of intense fighting in and around the town's narrow streets, the earl 'decided to quit the field', evading capture and certain death at the hands of his vengeful opponents. Somerset's frustration at failing to capture his nemesis must have been almost palpable, although tempered somewhat by the discovery that Warwick, in his haste to escape, had left behind King Henry. According to a Milanese ambassador's report a few weeks later, the king was found laughing and singing under a tree by Somerset around a mile from the battlefield, although no other contemporary English source mentions their sovereign acting in such a manner. The ambassador also noted the queen and Somerset had persuaded the maddened king to resign his throne to Prince Edward, not the first time a Beaufort was accused of imploring a king of England to abdicate his throne in favour of his heir. The claim was repeated on 15 March, although the ambassador did add that 'these are rumours in which I do not repose much confidence'.[11] It's unlikely Somerset advocated placing a child on the throne at such a critical juncture, even accounting for the king's unstable frame of mind.

After the battle, the Lancastrians also captured Warwick's younger brother John Neville, Lord Montagu, who would have been put to death had the Yorkists not themselves been in possession of Somerset's own younger brother, Edmund Beaufort. The younger Beaufort had been involved in an incident on the Isle of Wight on 16 December 1460 when his retinue of sixty-one men was overwhelmed by a force under the command of a Warwick retainer named Geoffrey Gate. Edmund was briefly imprisoned in Carisbrooke Castle, still technically a Beaufort property, before his removal to the more secure Tower of London. Understandably, Somerset concluded that to execute Montagu would amount to sentencing his own brother to death.[12]

The Second Battle of St Albans must surely have been an emotional day for the duke, on what may have been the first time he had visited

the town since witnessing his father's death. Considering the religious nature of the period, it's plausible Henry visited the nearby abbey before leaving the town, perhaps even saying a quiet prayer in the Lady Chapel beneath which was buried the body of the elder Edmund Beaufort. Was Somerset able to saviour his second victory in as many months, or did lingering grief over his father's death and concern for his imprisoned brother prohibit any celebration?

With the path to London cleared, the Lancastrians continued their interrupted march, but soon came to rue their marauding during recent weeks. Their entry into the capital was blocked, and no amount of bargaining could persuade the terrified Londoners to back down. With provisions running low and disenchanted soldiers starting to desert the army, Queen Margaret gave the order to return to the north.

Edward of York had no such problems convincing the Londoners to allow his army entry. Reuniting with a chastened Warwick in Oxfordshire, the cousins entered the city on 27 February and acted with characteristic decisiveness; Henry VI was declared guilty of breaching the Act of Accord by returning to the Lancastrian fold, who themselves were charged with treason for killing Richard of York, the rightful heir to the throne as per the terms of the Act. By heading north, the Yorkist leaders argued that Henry had 'forfeited his crown and ought forto be deposed'.[13]

Consequently, on 4 March, outside St Paul's, Edward was proclaimed king in front of the Londoners, awestruck by a glorious figure who was the antithesis of the man who had absent-mindedly reigned for thirty-nine years. Although Edward received the royal regalia and robes while seated on the throne in Westminster Hall, he stopped short of being crowned, preferring to first crush the Lancastrian resistance.[14] With commendable confidence and determination, Edward headed north, collecting troops along the way for a decisive showdown. It was a bold strategy, for the north was a hostile region, as Edward's own father had found out to his cost a few months earlier.

Queen Margaret, with her oblivious husband and young son in tow, had retreated as far as York, where she now mulled over her plans with her primary commanders, including Somerset. Although only twenty-four years old, Henry Beaufort had already proved himself an accomplished general and, with victories at St Albans and Wakefield under his belt in previous months, was probably confident of completing a hat trick in coming weeks. Henry relied on the guidance of Andrew Trollope, who since his defection at Ludford Bridge had proved indispensable for his extensive military expertise, not to mention the input of senior figures such as Northumberland and Exeter. Together, they all plotted the Yorkists' downfall while awaiting their inevitable approach. That advancement was quicker than expected.

On 28 March, a Yorkist detachment under the command of Warwick reached the River Aire at Ferrybridge near Pontefract, finding their progress impeded by a broken bridge. Recent research suggests that around dawn the following morning, Palm Sunday and not Saturday as traditionally thought, a Lancastrian scouting force headed by Clifford and John Neville launched a surprise attack on the Yorkists, inflicting multiple casualties and injuring Warwick in the leg with an arrow. Lord Fauconberg, Warwick's uncle, was alerted of the ambush and crossed the river upstream at Castleford before flanking Clifford's troops from the west. In a ferocious skirmish, which precipitated the larger engagement a few hours later, the Lancastrians were gradually repelled and Clifford was felled by an arrow to the throat as he attempted to flee back to the main army.[15]

With the king, queen and prince secured within the York town walls, Somerset chose to set up camp near the village of Tadcaster, around twelve miles to the south-west. If Edward intended on capturing the largest city in the north, and its royal inhabitants, then Somerset ensured he would need to go through him first. Beaufort was willing to put his body on the line to protect the Lancastrian cause. With two vast forces claiming to be the rightful royal army, accusing the other of treasonous insurgency, the scene was set for a battle of unsurpassed brutality in which the crown of England was at stake.

On the night of 28 March, and before Clifford's fatal move, Somerset finalised his strategy with his fellow commanders. The camp was a hive of activity as armourers put the finishing touches to weapons while the soldiers readied themselves for a battle that could be their last on Earth. As it was the night before Palm Sunday, the start of Holy Week and one of the most revered days in the Christian calendar, prayers were heard in abundance while some soldiers took the opportunity to rest their weary bodies wherever they could, attempting to find warmth as a fierce snowstorm loomed ominously on the horizon.

The Lancastrians had scouted an ideal location on an exposed plateau between the villages of Towton and Saxton, a few miles south of Tadcaster, and once it became clear the Yorkists were making their final advance, orders were given to assume battle positions. Somerset's army was slightly uphill, facing south, with a deep ravine to their right in which the Cock Beck flowed, swollen by the rains, before meandering behind their lines. To prevent an attack from the rear, the bridge crossing the Wharfe in Tadcaster was demolished, in theory safeguarding their position. As it transpired, this order merely hemmed Somerset's men into a death trap.

Once the Yorkist army, fresh from the Ferrybridge engagement, had organised their lines, cries were heard from both sides in support of their respective kings. It had started to snow heavily, with swirling winds obscuring vision and leaving the ground icy white, hardly ideal conditions for a life-or-death confrontation. It was tacitly acknowledged by all that this was to be a decisive battle, with any traditional rules of engagement suspended. Somerset himself probably recognised that should he be captured alive it was unlikely he would survive the day if previous encounters were any indication. Of course, the same was true in reverse, and Henry Beaufort still retained hope of getting his hands on Warwick. Nervous tension must have coursed through his body as he stared across the terrain, his battle standard of blue and white with the Beaufort Portcullis fluttering in the cold air.

The fighting commenced with the Lancastrian archers loosing their

arrows into the cold sky, although unbeknownst to them their efforts fell woefully short, losing range in the tempestuous wind. The Yorkist archers simply gathered up the arrows and shot them straight back whence they came, finding their targets with devastating accuracy. Somerset had probably hoped to encourage the enemy to attack him uphill, where he could pick them off from his advantageous position, but the unforeseen slaughter of his own archers prompted the duke to order his infantry to advance. Leading by example, and protected by a full harness of armour with his Beaufort arms prominently sewn onto his tabard, Somerset charged into battle. Hours of claustrophobic hand-to-hand combat followed, leaving hundreds of men dying by the hour amid the incessant clanging of steel upon steel.

The fighting was furious, but generally even-handed, until the arrival of the duke of Norfolk's forces in the early afternoon. Norfolk smashed into the Lancastrian left flank, gradually causing Somerset's men to pivot until, disastrously, they had their backs to the ravine and the flooded Cock Beck. As Edward's forces started to overwhelm Somerset's the Lancastrian line disintegrated, with soldiers choosing to flee for their lives rather than stand their ground. What followed was slaughter on an unfathomable scale, for the Lancastrians were, in George Neville, Bishop of Exeter's words, 'routed and broken in pieces'. The panicked soldiers generally headed in two directions; some fled down the ravine towards the Cock but, finding it tough to scramble back up the opposite bank in the icy conditions, were butchered en masse. Others headed north but found the bridge across the Wharfe destroyed by their own hand and drowned in considerable numbers attempting to cross the freezing water while evading their bloodthirsty pursuers.

No quarter was given and no mercy granted, prompting Bishop Neville to report 'so many dead bodies were seen as to cover an area six miles long by three broad and about four furlongs'. Thousands, perhaps even tens of thousands, of Englishmen lay dead in blood-splattered snow, 'a number unheard of in our realm for almost a thousand years'. Among those butchered at the hands of their fellow countrymen were Northumberland and Trollope, including forty-two

knights executed after the battle on Edward's orders. It is unsurprising the Milanese ambassador described the battle as 'great and cruel' on 18 April, wryly adding, 'as happens when men fight for kingdom and life'.[16]

The duke of Somerset was one of the lucky few, with Exeter and his half-brother Ros, who escaped the massacre. The threesome fled once it became clear the day was lost, and, with bounties on their heads, had grooms standing by with horses for a swift escape. Somerset rode hard towards York, where he may have informed the king and queen in person of the devastating news. They didn't have time to tarry. Once the killing had ended, Edward, his supremacy absolute, would be heading their way. Gathering up provisions and their few possessions, the Lancastrian leadership fled north out of York and headed towards Scotland. Somerset's brother-in-law, James Butler, earl of Wiltshire, married to his sister Eleanor, was not so fortunate; he was captured and executed near Newcastle on 1 May.

Why did Somerset, who Waurin rated as one of the finest knights in England,[17] lose Towton? Commanding such a large army was a novel experience for the duke, still young in age. It seems possible he struggled to maintain discipline among his troops once Norfolk arrived on the scene, with his men deserting their positions under intense pressure. This task would have become significantly more difficult once his fellow captains, men such as Northumberland and Trollope, were slain. His initial position, facing slightly downhill, worked against him, with the snowstorm blowing directly into his troops and nullifying any advantage gained from the higher ground. On a summer's day, Somerset's starting position may have had a positive result. Above all, however, regardless of Henry Beaufort's own competence on the battlefield, one shouldn't discount the efforts of Edward of York, a ferocious warrior who, according to the *Croyland Chronicle*, was 'tall of stature, elegant in person, of unblemished character and valiant in arms'.[18] Edward could galvanise his troops in a way King Henry, cowering behind the walls of York fifteen miles away, was unable to do in his entire life, even accounting for the fact the Lancastrian king had far greater noble representation among his

troops at Towton.

The Yorkist victory at Towton crushed the Lancastrian hegemony in the north, and with the south already largely devoted to his cause, Edward returned to London a conquering hero. He now claimed the throne by divine right of conquest as well as inheritance, and on 26 June 1461, with Henry VI having abandoned his realm, was crowned Edward IV in Westminster Abbey. As grandson of Joan Beaufort, Edward became the first Beaufort-descended king of England, not that this placated Somerset or his siblings, of course. The deposition of Henry VI, and with it the House of Lancaster, was devastating for the House of Beaufort, whose prospects had always been dependent on their cousins' generosity. The House of York were no friends of the Beauforts, and with Somerset a penniless political exile in Scotland unsure how to uphold the cause of a witless king, the future did not bode well for the dynasty over which he ruled.

Great Enemies
1462–1464

The first parliament of Edward IV's reign assembled in Westminster on 4 November 1461, and during the six-month proceedings the lingering Lancastrian threat was dealt a severe blow when the land, money and titles of those who remained loyal to the flagging cause of Henry VI were seized. During the opening session, Edward was commended 'for the redempcion' of England from the 'persecution and tirannye' of his 'grete and insaciable ennemyes', tyranny which allegedly included 'extortion, murdre, rape, effucion of innocent Blode, riots and unrightwisnes'.[1]

It was a damning judgement of a thirty-nine-year Lancastrian reign that, according to the triumphant Yorkist regime, had descended into oppressive despotism. In fact, Lancastrian rule since 1399 was pronounced unlawful, while Edward's father and grandfather, the duke of York and earl of Cambridge respectively, were absolved of treason. As propaganda for the masses it proved effective, and for many contemporaries the bitter war had reached a conclusive end.

Henry Beaufort received specific attention, singled out for his considerable role in the death of 'the right and noble and famous prynce of wurthy memorie' Richard of York, 'horribly, cruelly and tyrannously murdered' at Wakefield in December 1460 'ageynst all humanite and nature of Nobles'. Somerset was accused of acting with 'extreme and insatiate malice and violence', and was unsurprisingly attainted alongside a hundred other Lancastrian adherents. As well as Somerset, King Henry, Queen Margaret, Prince Edward, the duke of Exeter, the earls of Northumberland, Devon and Pembroke and the lords Roos and Hungerford were among those charged with treason, no longer able to

> have, hold, enherit or joy, any name of Dignite, Estate or Preemynence, within the same Reame, in Irlond or Wales, or in Caleys, or in the Marches therof; and that their heires be unable to cleyme or have by theym any such name, estate or preemynence.[2]

The Beaufort estates, carefully accumulated over three generations since John Beaufort was created 1st Earl of Somerset in 1397, were taken into crown possession, and there was little Henry could do. The process had, in fact, started several months before parliament confirmed the attainder; on 10 March 1461, almost three weeks before Towton, Humphrey Stafford, as sheriff of Somerset and Dorset, was ordered to take control of all Beaufort possessions in those counties, while on 27 April Thomas Combe, sheriff of Surrey and Sussex, was handed a similar commission. Every castle, manor house and tenement belonging to Henry was seized, with some of the lands redistributed to those loyal to the new regime. On 24 June 1461, for example, Otewell Worsley was granted the constableship of Chirk Castle, with the lordship itself granted to the king's younger brother Richard, duke of Gloucester, on 9 September 1462.[3] Intriguingly, Chirk was later transferred to William Stanley in 1475, a decade before his fateful intervention at Bosworth placed the eventual Beaufort heir, Henry Tudor, on the throne of England.[4]

Although Henry Beaufort had yet to produce any legitimate heirs, provided the Yorkists remained on the throne, there would be no inheritance to bequeath. Support in England from once faithful friends would also be hard to come by in future, for Edward made it abundantly clear that anyone who stood against him in the field, or assisted those denounced as traitors, would 'never hereafter be accepted to his seid grace, nor be pardoned, but utterly punyshed'.[5]

Although Somerset presumably took little notice of what the Yorkist parliament decreed, the Lancastrian position by the end of 1461 was desperate, facing a popular new king who embodied the ideal medieval monarch; Edward was handsome and affable at court while courageous and commanding on the battlefield. His reign

represented a new dawn, providing hope for a beleaguered realm in the midst of a crippling economic crisis that showed no signs of abating, regardless of who wore the crown. The Beauforts' Neville kinsmen, meanwhile, were reaping the rewards of the Yorkist ascendancy, memories of their grandfather Ralph Neville's contribution to the Lancastrian conquest of 1399 quietly suppressed. Warwick's influence as the king's chief counsellor was unsurpassed, as was his landed estate and income, while his uncle Lord Fauconberg was created earl of Kent shortly before the November 1461 parliament, and admiral the following summer. Warwick's brother George Neville, meanwhile, was appointed the first Lord Chancellor of the Yorkist era.[6] If Edward IV's kingship came at the expense of Henry VI, then the Nevilles' political ascendancy undoubtedly came at the expense of the Beauforts.

Faced with such formidable opposition, the Lancastrian leaders who survived Towton had fled into Scotland after the battle, banished from a kingdom their families had collectively ruled for decades. Only a couple of Welsh and Northumberland castles remained in their control. Once settled across the border, the exiles deliberated on the best course of action to revive their apparently hopeless cause. Thousands of soldiers and several experienced commanders had been killed during defeats at Blore Heath, Northampton and Towton, and the likelihood of mustering another full-strength force was slim. Their task was made more difficult by a series of proclamations issued throughout England, accusing men like Somerset, Exeter and Roos of being 'in warlike guise', and who, in 'divers places', were

> committing treasons, robberies etc, oppressing wives, widows, maidens and women of religion, slaying and maiming liegemen in such cruelness as has not been heard done among Saracens or Turks to Christian men.[7]

It was powerful propaganda, and must have obstructed the Lancastrians' ability to attract recruits. Nonetheless, they conducted several cross-border raids into Northumberland, a region in which Sir

Ralph Percy, the younger brother of the fallen 3rd Earl of Northumberland, still enjoyed considerable support. On 12 June 1461, a Scottish force under Exeter besieged Carlisle, prompting King Edward to order Warwick and his brother John, Lord Montagu, to march north to suppress the incursion. By the end of September, Warwick, recently appointed Warden of the East and West March, had not only relieved Carlisle but had also captured Alnwick and Dunstanburgh castles for good measure. Percy, as constable of the latter, submitted to Edward and proceeded to hold the castle against, rather than for, the Lancastrians, although just a month later the wavering knight defected back again. In October, meanwhile, Pembroke and Exeter were overwhelmed in west Wales and chased into exile.[8]

In the interim, Margaret of Anjou cast her glances for assistance further afield, before deciding to appeal to her husband's uncle, Charles VII of France, for aid. The embassy that left Scotland at the start of June was headed by Lord Hungerford and Robert Whittingham, but covertly included Somerset. Shortly after their arrival, however, the envoys received word that the French king had passed away during their voyage, with his heir Louis XI favouring peace with the House of York rather than a Lancastrian alliance. The envoys, accompanied by four or five squires, were swiftly apprehended, and by the end of August, Somerset, lacking letters of safe conduct like his compatriots, was imprisoned in Arques Castle.[9] It was hardly a promising development for the Lancastrian cause, or for Somerset's own immediate prospects, and it was only through the eventual intervention of Charles, Count of Charolais, that his English friend was released.[10]

Margaret was not deterred, however, nor would she be while her son lived. Alnwick was recaptured by the Lancastrians a few months later by Sir William Tailboys, a survivor of Towton, while rumours abounded in early 1462 of a sweeping southern invasion of Yorkist England while King Edward was in the north, 'a great conspiracy' that apparently involved Pembroke and Exeter landing in Wales; Somerset, Hungerford and Margaret's brother John of Calabria disembarking in

East Anglia; and a French force taking Kent. This opportunistic attack was to be followed by a secondary assault led by the kings of Aragon, Portugal, France and Denmark, some of whom had dynastic connections with the House of Lancaster. Their contact within England was John de Vere, 12th Earl of Oxford, who had been in the wardship of Thomas Beaufort, duke of Exeter, as a minor between 1417 and 1426. The plot, although unlikely to have been as extensive or organised as claimed, collapsed when one of Oxford's messengers informed Edward of the intrigue, prompting the earl's arrest on 12 February and execution two weeks later.[11]

Clearly unable to compete with Yorkist resources, in April Margaret departed for France to personally negotiate with Louis, who despite his Yorkist leanings was nonetheless her first cousin. She proved persuasive, and on 23 June 1462 at Chinon, struck a deal that not only secured a hundred-year truce with Louis, but provided her a loan of 20,000 *livres tournois* with a small body of soldiers. The cost to her husband was high; should the Lancastrians recapture the throne, they would hand over Calais.[12] Margaret had little choice if the Lancastrian cause was to have any future, for in her absence Warwick had courted the Scottish, with a temporary truce between Yorkist England and the Scots was agreed at the end of June, depriving the Lancastrians their safe haven north of the border. Montagu subsequently took the opportunity to threaten Alnwick once more, and the fortress eventually surrendered to the Yorkists for the second time at the end of July.

In the meantime, Henry Beaufort had returned to Flanders with Charolais after his release from Arques and was based in Bruges for much of the winter and following spring. Although no longer a prisoner, the duke of Somerset had been detached from the main Lancastrian host for several months, and possibly started developing doubts about the likelihood of his party's eventual triumph, particularly as he grew accustomed to life in an extravagant Burgundian court. Over a year had elapsed since Edward of York wrested the crown from Henry of Lancaster, and nothing suggested there would be a reverse in the near future. Somerset was unmarried

and still only thirty-five years old, and it is not unfathomable he was concerned about facing decades in exile, flitting around the coast of England without the men, money or motivation to truly threaten an increasingly secure Yorkist throne. Disillusionment was understandable, even in a soldier as partisan as Somerset.

By March 1462, the duke was back in Scotland,[13] as the Oxford conspiracy, whatever his role, had proved to be an ignominious failure. Somerset probably departed from Scotland again in the summer after the agreement of the temporary truce, and by September, if the information of Paston servant John Russe was accurate, he first entered discussions with Warwick, his long-standing adversary, over possibly defecting.[14]. If true, Beaufort must have been in an utterly desperate situation to have considered such a step, having hitherto been fervently loyal to his king and queen. As for Warwick, whatever he thought of his younger kinsman, it seems likely there was a grudging respect between the two great-grandsons of John of Gaunt.

Whatever doubts Somerset was having, in the autumn he again committed himself to another attack on Northumberland, linking up with Margaret and her modest force of 800 French troops and forty ships, funded by a still-indifferent King Louis. The fleet landed in the north-east on 25 October 1462 and swiftly recaptured Alnwick and Bamburgh castles. Their presence failed to rouse any significant support in the region, however, and upon hearing Edward and Warwick were preparing to return north with a vast force, Margaret placed Somerset in charge of Bamburgh and attempted to flee back to France with her husband in tow. The fleet had barely left the harbour when they were caught in a storm and shipwrecked on Holy Island, although the deposed royal couple were able to commandeer a fisherman's vessel to escape into Scottish waters.[15]

It may have been this latest failure to make any considerable advance that finally encouraged Somerset, for so long an implacable enemy of the House of York, to seek reconciliation. Warwick's arrival in Northumberland initiated a thoroughly organised, and well-

provisioned, siege of the three castles in Lancastrian possession, with the Neville earl riding daily between the fortresses from his base in Warkworth to ensure his orders were faithfully executed. With supplies running low, Somerset recognised a relief force was unlikely to materialise in the near future, and surrendered Bamburgh into Warwick's hands on 24 December 1462, with Dunstanburgh soon following.

It was a momentous coup for the Yorkist regime. Somerset was not only the embodiment of Lancastrian resistance to Edward's rule, but a highly capable military commander who could bring a wealth of experience to his new allies. For the Lancastrians, his defection was nothing other than disastrous. It is little surprise Alnwick Castle submitted in the first week of January 1463 when the dispirited garrison beheld Warwick and Somerset, the bitterest of enemies, standing side by side outside the fortress, together after eight relentless years of deadly animosity. Henry Beaufort now pledged to be 'trewe and faythefulle' to those responsible for the death of his father.[16] Incredibly, he may even have been present at Fotheringhay on 30 January 1463 when Edward observed a funeral service for his own father and brother, slain at Wakefield in December 1460 by Somerset's own troops.[17] It would take a commendable amount of goodwill on both their parts to ensure the fledgling alliance could endure under the weight of such acrimonious history.

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Somerset's decision to defect was quickly vindicated. After swearing an oath of fealty to Edward in person at Durham, the duke received the king's 'levery and grete rewardys' in return,[18] part of which may have included a golden Yorkist decorative collar similar in premise to the Lancastrian 'SS' collar once borne by Somerset's forebears. Livery collars under Edward IV proudly advertised the king's York-Mortimer ancestry, with the Sun in Splendour and White Rose insignia prominent along with a Lion of March pendant. The king would later ordain that 'every lord and knight within the household dayly wear a

coller of the kinges livery about his necke',[19] and there was no greater indication that the wearer was considered the king's man. It seems likely Henry received such an item soon after his defection, his new allegiance broadcast for all to see whenever he appeared in public.

The duke also received a general pardon on 10 March 1463,[20] while his attainder was reversed during the April parliament, despite the 'haynousite, horribilitie and crueltee of his offences'.[21] Where possible, Somerset's Beaufort inheritance was returned, and on 30 March, no doubt due to the duke's newfound influence with the king, his mother Eleanor was even granted an annuity of £222 4*s* 6*d*, to be drawn from the petty custom of the London port and the royal exchequer.[22] On 18 May, meanwhile, the dowager duchess received a royal pardon for any role she played in the treason of her Beaufort and Ros offspring,[23] while in July, the duke's brother Edmund was finally released from the Tower after two years in captivity.[24] Perhaps most promising of all, Somerset was embraced deep into the inner circle of Edward IV, the man he had spent two years attempting to unseat.

The pair rode south to London together, where it soon became evident that the erstwhile enemies had become firm friends. It was observed Somerset 'loggyd whythe the kynge in hys owne bedde many nyghtys, and sum tyme rode a huntynge behynde the kynge', while Edward commemorated the duke's defection with a great joust at Westminster, in which Somerset 'ranne fulle justely'. To share the royal bed, in a non-sexual manner, was a significant political statement on Edward's behalf and emphasised his genuine desire for reconciliation with the duke. There could be no greater demonstration of the sudden closeness between the pair. Truly, the king 'lovyd hym welle', although the chronicler Gregory, writing with the benefit of hindsight supposed Somerset plotted 'treson undyr fayre chere and wordys'.[25] It was a remarkable reversal of fortunes that bewildered contemporaries, not least Margaret of Anjou, who had lost her most ardent supporter to her greatest enemy.

The one person on the Yorkist side who may have resented this

development was John Neville, Lord Montagu. While his brother Warwick appeared willing to overlook past transgressions, having been involved in negotiating the duke's surrender, Montagu probably perceived Somerset's acceptance into Yorkist circles as a threat to his own position as one of Edward's preferred military commanders. Somerset and Montagu shared an acrimonious history, stemming from their confrontation in London in December 1456 and subsequent clash at the Second Battle of St Albans in February 1461, after which Montagu was Somerset's prisoner for a month.

Margaret's hopes of restoring her husband to the throne were severely dented by Somerset's desertion. In July 1463, she again sailed from Scotland for France, taking with her most of the exiled Lancastrian court, including Prince Edward, Exeter, Pembroke, Somerset's half-brother Ros, John Fortescue, John Morton and several household knights.[26] They were given refuge by Margaret's father René in his castle at Koeur, which became her base for the next eight years. Notably absent was King Henry, who remained behind in Edinburgh, perhaps too ill for the journey or no longer Margaret's focal point for her campaign. At almost ten years old, it was Edward who represented the future of Lancaster, not his aging, witless father.

Although an Anglo-French-Burgundian treaty between Edward IV, Louis XI and Phillip of Burgundy in October 1463 further weakened the fragile Lancastrian resistance, Somerset had started to develop misgivings about his allegiance to York. The duke's initial submission to Edward appears sincere, for which he and his family had been amply compensated. Circumstances, however, were changing. In the summer of 1463, the king gathered two hundred of his men and departed from London heading to the north, intending 'to see and understonde the dysposyscyon of the pepylle'. Somerset was appointed leader of the king's guard, with a small force composed of his own soldiers, leaving no doubt Edward 'hadde that duke in moche favyr and trustyd hym well'.

It soon became clear, however, that some of the king's subjects didn't share the same confidence. When the royal entourage arrived in

Northampton on 25 July, the citizens took up arms when they beheld the Beaufort duke riding alongside the king and possibly attired in the royal livery, and attempted to lynch him. Edward intervened, and 'with fayre speche and grete defeculte savyde hys lyffe for that tyme', quelling the townsfolk's murderous rage with the gift of a tun of wine. For his own safety, Somerset was dispatched to his former north Welsh lordship of Chirk, now in the possession of the king's brother Richard, while his men were sent onwards to Newcastle.[27]

Just as he had become disenchanted with the Lancastrian cause while in Bruges, Somerset now revaluated his position while isolated from the main Yorkist host. With a fresh Lancastrian force once more threatening the Northumbrian coast, some time in November, Somerset, 'with owte any leve of the kynge', departed Chirk and headed towards Newcastle where his troops had assembled. While resting in Durham, the duke was seen by Yorkist spotters, and although barefoot and dressed only in a shirt, managed to slip away, albeit without his casket and harness.[28]

What were Somerset's reasons for turning his back on Edward IV, the man who had returned his money, titles and status? Despite the dogged determination of Margaret of Anjou and the tireless efforts of adherents like Pembroke, Exeter and Beaufort's own half-brother Thomas Ros, the prospect of a Lancastrian victory appeared increasingly implausible as the decade progressed. It almost seemed foolish for Somerset to turn his back on his Yorkist flirtation at this juncture, and one can only assume he had struggled to truly abandon his innate fidelity to Henry VI. He may even have regretted his defection. The duke had, for all intents and purposes, chosen the life of an impoverished, nomadic rebel over that of a valued royal favourite. Perhaps Henry Beaufort, a soldier to his very core, simply yearned to be at the heart of a military movement rather than enjoying the pampered life of a wealthy magnate.

King Edward was infuriated when Somerset's duplicity was exposed, and on 20 December 1463 restored the duke's attainder, granting his younger brother Richard of Gloucester

> all castles, lordships, manors, lands, rents and services, late of Henry Beaufort, late duke of Somerset, in England and Wales and elsewhere, in the king's hands by reason of his forfeiture, without rendering anything to the king.[29]

Edward channelled his anger towards crushing the remnants of Lancastrian insurgency in the northern extremities of his kingdom, a persistent drain on his time and resources. On 9 December, the Yorkists had agreed a ten-month truce with the Scottish regency council with a view to extending it the following year, securing the border and depriving the recalcitrant Lancastrians of a convenient refuge.[30] Fortunately for Somerset, Bamburgh, Alnwick and Dunstanburgh castles had fallen back into Lancastrian hands in March 1463 when Sir Ralph Percy and Ralph Grey, who had switched sides to the Yorkists alongside Beaufort a few months earlier, defected once again. As both men had been magnanimously permitted by Edward to retain their positions as constable, the castles also changed hands. Both Henry VI and Somerset now flew into the safety of Bamburgh's towering keep, and remained behind the sandstone walls until the spring of 1464.

It's unclear how Somerset was received by the garrison within Bamburgh's walls, having so recently crossed the divide. Perhaps he was forced to renew his oath to King Henry, or maybe the beleaguered troops were contented to have the vigorous commander back among their ranks, recognising his true allegiance to Lancaster. Somerset's tenure with Edward IV may have hardened the duke's resolve to revive the flagging Lancastrian cause, and by March 1464, his resurgent force had captured several castles in the Tyne Valley, including Langley, Hexham and Bywell, along with Norham on the Scottish border and Skipton in Yorkshire.[31] With Alnwick, Bamburgh and Dunstanburgh providing the Lancastrians a twenty-mile dominion along the coast, the addition of some inland fortresses provided Somerset an ideal base from which to disrupt Edward's plans to meet with the Scots at York in April to ratify a fifteen-year truce.

The Yorkist king dispatched his trusty lieutenant Montagu, whom

he valued ‘for his hardinesse and sage conducte in marciall affairs’, into the north to escort the Scots embassy south, conscious that Somerset and his emboldened army were prowling the region. After avoiding a trap near Newcastle, Montagu succeeded in getting as far north as Alnwick where he turned north-west towards the small settlement of Wooler. On 25 April, the Neville lord reached the uneven terrain of Hedgeley Moor where he discovered his path blocked by the core of Somerset’s force, their weapons drawn and fully arrayed for battle. After an exchange of arrows, Montagu and his vanguard charged at the Lancastrian left flank, who, ‘without stroke striking’, suddenly broke and fled. Somerset attempted to fend off the superior force for as long as he could, but sensing defeat to be an inevitability, abandoned his position and absconded from the moor. Only Ralph Percy made the fatal decision to stand his ground, before he was eventually overwhelmed and ‘manfully slain’.[32]

Somerset’s latest gamble had failed, and Montagu was able to reach Scotland before returning to York with the Scottish ambassadors. The Lancastrians still retained their influence in the Tyne Valley, however, and quickly regrouped, albeit weakened by the Hedgeley Moor rout. Since reversing his defection, Somerset’s tactics had been bold, even reckless, and the duke seemed intent on settling scores in the north-east sooner rather than later. His actions almost suggest he had lost patience with the back-and-forth of the previous year, and was determined to chance his luck on the battlefield rather than spend his life on the run.

When Montagu returned north in May, Somerset was again waiting. With plans afoot for a larger Yorkist army under Edward’s command preparing to leave London for York, the duke’s strategy was to try and diminish the force already in the region. It would have been a sound rationale if it wasn’t for the fact that Somerset couldn’t hope to match the resources available to Montagu. Did Henry Beaufort genuinely believe he could outsmart his Neville rival in the field, or was he simply prepared to die trying?

On 15 May 1464, the two forces came face to face for the second

time, two miles south of Hexham. If Somerset's army had been merely defeated on Hedgeley Moor, then they were utterly destroyed at Hexham. The Lancastrian camp was based on a meadow known locally as the Linnels, low-lying ground enclosed to the west by the meandering Devil's Water and to the east by the Dipton woodland. Like at Towton three years earlier, Somerset's men were hindered by the topography of the surrounding area, and ultimately routed by a superior force that included Ralph Greystoke, a grandson of Joan Beaufort, countess of Westmorland, by a daughter of her first marriage. Unlike Towton, there would be no escape for Somerset, who was captured while many of his men were butchered desperately attempting to flee the slaughter by going across the water and up the opposite bank.

If Henry thought his ducal status, not to mention his brief friendship with the Yorkist king and Beaufort kinship to the Nevilles, would be enough to save his life, he was mistaken. With little fanfare, Somerset was dragged before Montagu, who took it upon himself, as Edward IV's leading northern commander, to sanction the duke's execution. The victor was unwilling to risk Edward pardoning his adversary a second time, and as Somerset's life was technically forfeit by the terms of his attainder, Montagu was legally justified in his action. At only twenty-eight years old Henry Beaufort's tumultuous life, one that had been tirelessly spent struggling to restore his family to their erstwhile pre-eminence, was cut short on a chopping block in rural northern England, his mutilated body interred without ceremony in the nearby abbey. The men who died next to him were comparatively minor figures: Sir Edmund FitzHugh, Edmund Bradshaw, Walter Hunt and a curious figure known only Black Jack.[33]

Although Somerset suffered several devastating losses on the battlefield, he had been a military commander of considerable promise, able to canvass great support among his affinity. In a different era, he may even have developed into one of England's most renowned and celebrated royal captains, his legacy assured, perhaps even revered. Henry's proficiency did not go unnoticed among contemporaries; in January 1461, the Venetian bishop of Teramo, in a

letter to Florence, noted how he respected the duke 'for his rare qualities and his love to the Queen and country'.[34] As it transpired, events that unfolded before he reached adulthood set Somerset on a hazardous, predetermined path from which he was unable to diverge. Other than his short dalliance with the Yorkists in 1463, Somerset proved utterly devoted to the Lancastrian cause, willing to risk his life year after year in a desperate effort to avenge his father's death. It was an all-consuming purpose which left little time for Henry to settle down and start a family.

As a royally descended duke, in a time of peace Somerset may have anticipated marrying into one of the mighty English dynasties, a union which would have brought supplementary wealth, lands and political influence into Beaufort possession. His father Edmund, for example, married into the powerful Beauchamp family, while grandfather John took a Holland niece of Richard II as his wife. Such an opportunity to settle down never presented itself to Henry due to the wars, although he fathered an illegitimate heir with a mistress named Joan Hill some time before he was forced into the life of an exiled rebel.[35]

Considering the frequency of Henry's periods away from England during the final four years of his life, it is likely that he didn't spend any significant length of time in his son's company. Nonetheless, the child, christened Charles, possibly for the duke's friend Charolais, was openly recognised as his bastard and eventually assumed the name Somerset to denote his parentage. After the termination of the legitimate Beaufort line in 1471, it was Charles who ultimately revived the family's fortunes, accompanying his cousin Henry Tudor on the Bosworth campaign in 1485, for which he was knighted, and receiving preferential treatment from his royal kinsmen that peaked with the earldom of Worcester in 1514.

King Edward's rage at Somerset's decision to return to the side of Henry VI is palpable from an entry in the *Parliamentary Rolls* shortly after the duke's death. Edward had overturned Somerset's attainder in 1463 as he was 'enclyned to the pollicie of peas, unyte and rest of his

Lande', but Beaufort, 'agenst nature of gentilnes and all humantie', had apparently remained 'secretly and fraudeulently in his old insaciate and cruell malice, to the subversion of the rightwis governaunce of this Lond'. The duke, 'by secrete and pryvate weyes', had reunited with Henry VI in Northumberland, the 'grete Ennemye and Adversarie' of the Yorkist king, and attempted, unsuccessfully, to destroy the king in battle, for which he had been justly executed.[36]

Somerset was not the only Lancastrian beheaded during the aftermath of the Hexham loss. His half-brother Thomas Ros, Robert Hungerford and three others were executed two days later in Newcastle, with seven more killed at Middleham Castle the following day. Fourteen others were executed in York between 25 and 28 May 1464.[37] The Neville siblings, Warwick and Montagu, had proved more than thorough in eviscerating the Lancastrian threat in the north. With no leadership left, on 23 June, Alnwick and Dunstanburgh castles submitted to the Nevilles, followed by Bamburgh after a brief siege. For his part in quelling the north, destroying the Percy affinity and killing Somerset, Montagu received the earldom of Northumberland as his reward.[38]

With Henry Beaufort dead, and Margaret of Anjou stranded in France with the remnants of the Lancastrian court, Henry VI was left isolated. He had been placed in Bywell Castle, about eight miles east of Hexham, before the battle and managed to slip away once news emerged of Somerset's defeat. The deposed king, bedraggled, deserted and probably confused, somehow eluded capture for an entire year before he was finally apprehended in July 1465. After he was paraded through the streets of London, Henry was safely locked up in the Tower of London, his home for the next five years.

The successive military failures at Hedgeley Moor and Hexham, with the conclusive loss of the Northumberland castles and the confirmation of a fifteen-year Anglo-Scottish truce, left the Lancastrian resistance in tatters. For the second time in less than a decade, the Beaufort family had lost the head of the family in violent circumstances. For Henry Beaufort's two younger brothers, Edmund

and John, there remained little incentive to remain in England under a hostile regime.

It seems likely they initially headed for Harlech Castle on the western coast of Wales, because a commission handed to Walter Devereux and William and Richard Herbert on 26 October 1464 granted them powers to offer pardons to the rebels, with the noticeable exception of ‘all sons of Edmund, sometime duke of Somerset’.[39] Harlech was the last remaining Lancastrian stronghold in England or Wales, offering a safe haven between the Irish Sea and Snowdonia for disaffected adherents of Henry VI. It couldn’t hope to hold out indefinitely, however, and the Beauforts shortly departed for mainland Europe, ‘by secrett, subtille and privat means’.[40] The war was over; Lancaster, and by association the Beauforts, had lost.

Crushing the Seed
1464–1471

In the middle of September 1464, barely four months after the resounding Yorkist victory at Hexham, a startling announcement from the lips of Edward IV shocked the assembled lords of his Council into a nervous silence. They had gathered at Reading Abbey to discuss, among other matters, the king's marriage into one of Europe's foremost royal dynasties. Instead, they now discovered their sovereign had already taken a wife, one Elizabeth Wydeville, the widow of a Lancastrian knight named John Grey who had fallen fighting the Yorkists at St Albans in 1461.[1] Although the daughter of a knight and the dowager duchess of Bedford, it was unquestionably an unsuitable match for a king of England, one that 'greatly offended the people' of his kingdom as observed by the Milanese ambassador.[2]

The revelation of the king's clandestine union scuppered the earl of Warwick's plans to secure a French alliance and signified the first breach in an increasingly fragile partnership between the cousins. If Warwick could come to terms with the marriage itself, his gradual displacement from the king's side proved a different matter. The Wydeville family was extensive and Edward felt compelled to provide for his new in-laws, 'enriching them with boundless presents and always promoting them to the most dignified offices about his person'.[3] In particular, several advantageous marriages were contracted in the following three years for the queen's siblings: Anne was married to the heir of the Bourchier earl of Essex, Mary to Raglan's heir Sir William Herbert, and Katherine to the underage Henry Stafford, duke of Buckingham. Elizabeth's brother John Wydeville, meanwhile, was wed to the elderly dowager duchess of Norfolk, Katherine Neville, daughter of Joan Beaufort and Warwick's aunt, a match that raised eyebrows as the bride was in her sixties while the groom had yet to reach his twentieth birthday. Queen

Elizabeth's eldest son from her first marriage, Thomas Grey, also benefitted, despite his tender age, when he was betrothed to Anne Holland, the heiress of the exiled duke of Exeter and Anne of York, the king's own sister.

Warwick could only observe with jealous frustration as potential matches for his own two daughters and nephew George vanished into the clutches of the Wydevilles. The family's emergence also coincided with Warwick losing influence over the royal cousin he alone had hitherto guided, with Edward growing increasingly obdurate to the earl's political judgement and keen to assume a more proactive role in governing his realm. Compounding matters were the differing opinions Warwick and Edward had regarding foreign policy, which only served to further drive a wedge between the two men.

The king preferred friendship with the Burgundians while Warwick favoured a French alliance, spending much of 1466 and 1467 pursuing an agreement with the wily Louis XI. Upon returning to England from one particular negotiation with the French king in June 1467, Warwick was greeted with news that his brother George had been dismissed as chancellor, Edward provocatively taking it upon himself to retrieve the Great Seal from the archbishop of York.[4] With the king increasingly preferring the counsel of men such as William Herbert and William Hastings over Warwick's, not to mention the omnipresence of the Wydevilles, it was clear the Neville dominance of the House of York had come to an end. Many men would have been satisfied with their position as England's richest magnate, but Warwick was not like most men. The marriage of the king's sister, Margaret of York, to Charles, the new duke of Burgundy, in July 1468 and Edward's determination to declare war on France, pushed an aggrieved Richard Neville over the edge.

For the Beauforts, Margaret of Anjou and the rest of the Lancastrian court-in-exile, such a change in circumstance gradually opened the door for a renewed assault on the House of York. The Lancastrian cause had been severely diminished by the defeat at Hexham in May 1464, but while Henry VI's line endured, a small

collection of adherents plotted from their impoverished court in Koeur, overseen by the deposed king's tenacious wife. Though their numbers were few, the exiled court possessed several significant characters, including John Courtenay, earl of Devon, a grandson of John Beaufort, 1st Earl of Somerset through his mother Margaret; John Butler, earl of Ormonde; John Fortescue; and ecclesiastic figures like John Morton and Thomas Bird, bishop of St Asaph. Jasper Tudor was also a periodic visitor, although as Louis XI's first cousin he was taken into the service of the French king.

The two surviving Beaufort siblings, Edmund and John, meanwhile, had found a friendly protector in their dead brother's friend Charles, count of Charolais, heir to the dukedom of Burgundy and, as great-grandson of John of Gaunt, strongly inclined towards aiding his Lancastrian kinsmen, some of whom 'were reduced to such want extremity of want and poverty' that it was observed 'no common beggar could have been poorer'. Henry Holland, duke of Exeter, was even allegedly found barefoot and barelegged, begging door to door for bread.[5]

As Henry's male heir, Edmund was styled duke of Somerset by his fellow Lancastrians although he seemed more content to remain in the service of Charolais than withdraw to Koeur. Considering the known extravagance of the Burgundian court, and the improbability of an upturn in Lancastrian fortunes in the near future, Edmund's decision was rational. His brother had died fighting a losing cause; perhaps Edmund felt a career in the service of the Burgundians was the best alternative.

In return for protection, Edmund participated in Charolais' war against Louis XI during 1465, when the count colluded with the king's estranged brother Charles, duke of Berry, and several other French nobles in protesting the king's assertion of centralised authority over his vassals. On 5 July, Charolais' men, possibly with Edmund among his retinue, besieged Paris for five days before moving south of the capital where, on 16 June near Montlhéry, his forces clashed with the king's. After a hard-fought battle, there was no clear victor and both

sides gradually dispersed, exhausted by their efforts. If Edmund was present on the battlefield, as seems likely, then he was fighting against Louis XI and René of Anjou, which must have raised some eyebrows among Margaret's court at Koeur.[6]

The following years were uneventful for the brothers as they settled into life at the opulent Burgundian court, considered by John Paston in 1468 as comparable only to the mythical court of King Arthur.[7] Charolais was a passionate patron of the arts and enjoyed music, singing and classical literature, particularly when it featured great warriors such as Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. He was also later noted to be a keen military tactician and spent much of his time labouring over the administration and organisation of his troops. Perhaps this was something he discussed in detail with his Beaufort kinsmen while they were guests at his court.

Ambitious beyond measure, Charolais was determined to become a colossus in European politics; he thought himself to be destined for accomplishments on par with those he read about in the classics.[8] He must have been an inspirational, if intense, man to be around, and the Beauforts could not have failed to have been caught up in the count's fervour. Perhaps they were even motivated by Charolais' enthusiasm to one day recover their lost inheritance across the Channel, which was gradually dispersed among Edward's closest supporters after the death and attainder of their brother Henry. In November 1466, for example, the queen's brother Anthony Wydeville was given the Beaufort lordship of Wight and Carisbrooke Castle, while on 15 September 1467, John, Lord Wenlock, was permitted to repossess all moveable goods he could find belonging to the deceased Beaufort duke. On 18 July 1468, John Brokeman was granted 450 acres of Beaufort land in Birchington and Monkton on the Isle of Thanet, Kent, while a few weeks later the Cornish manors of Alwerton and Tywarnhayle were given to the king's brother, Richard of Gloucester. The royal duke also received the Beaufort-held lordship of Bedminster on 25 October and lordship of Wilmington, Kent, on 20 November. Shortly after Henry Beaufort's execution, meanwhile, 'divers jewels and goods' belonging to him were seized in London, including three

tablets of gold decorated with rubies, diamonds, pearls and other precious stones, a saucer bound with gold and also garnished with rubies and diamonds, five cups of gold, two silver-gilt bowls, two silver-gilt spice plates and a dozen silver vases valued at £1,000. All were objects his brothers may have had reasonable expectations of inheriting under normal circumstances.[9]

The Beauforts' frustrations had been compounded when news crossed the Channel in March 1467 that their mother Eleanor, the widow of the duke killed at St Albans in 1455, had passed away.[10] The final years of the duchess's life were filled with grief as she mourned the deaths of her husband Edmund in 1455, sons Thomas Ros and Henry Beaufort in 1464, and the exile of two further sons in the years thereafter.

For the latter two, their presence in the Low Countries ended abruptly in June 1468 when Charles, who had become duke of Burgundy the previous summer after his father's death, welcomed his intended bride Margaret of York, the sister of Edward IV, to Bruges. Although proud of his Lancastrian credentials, Charles needed to secure his own position against French aggression and a match with England, albeit a Yorkist England, made political sense. The union did create an awkward situation for the rebels in his household, however, so rather than be present for the arrival of a Yorkist princess, the Beaufort brothers wisely departed Bruges the day before her arrival.[11] Although it is unclear where they headed, Edmund's later presence in Burgundy suggests he simply relocated within in the duchy for the time being.

Louis XI's response to the marital alliance between two of his chief adversaries was to sponsor a small Lancastrian invasion of north Wales under the command of Jasper Tudor, who purposefully marched across the country to Denbigh, which he burned to the ground. It was a pyrrhic victory; Edward in response commanded Sir William Herbert to amass a vast force to capture Harlech Castle, the last remaining Lancastrian outpost in the kingdom. It duly submitted on 14 August 1468, more than seven years after Towton,[12] for which

Herbert was rewarded with Tudor's forfeited earldom of Pembroke. Nonetheless, if Edward was hoping for his new brother-in-law Burgundy's assistance in invading France he was to be disappointed, for in October 1468 Duke Charles agreed a truce with Louis, much to Beaufort and Lancastrian relief. Of greater significance, however, was Warwick's 'great disagreement'[13] with the king, which gradually manifested into rebellion against Edward.

In April 1469, an insurrection in the north was led by an elusive figure known as Robin of Redesdale, although swiftly suppressed by Warwick's brother Northumberland. A separate movement emerged under another leader named Robin of Holderness, demanding the restoration of the Percys, but again Northumberland acted decisively to quell the unrest. A third rising under Redesdale, however, proved far more difficult to deal with, and was encouraged by Warwick using his northern Neville affinity, notwithstanding Northumberland's involvement, as he was presumably kept in the dark.

In June, Edward decided to travel north to personally face down the rebels amid rumours that not only was Warwick involved, but also George Neville, archbishop of York, and the king's brother George, duke of Clarence. The king wrote to his cousins and brother on 9 June but their response was noncommittal, and on 4 July they crossed to Calais where, one week later, Clarence married Warwick's daughter Isabel. As Clarence was Edward's heir presumptive, it was a significant coup for Warwick.

Together, father and son-in-law then announced their support for the northern rebels and issued a manifesto after the wedding outlining their issues with Edward's regime. It was characteristic of earlier anti-Lancastrian Yorkist statements, explaining the petitioners' unhappiness at their exclusion from power in favour of seditious persons while disorder spread throughout an over-taxed realm.[14] A few days later, Warwick and Clarence landed at Kent before marching through London towards the Midlands with a growing force, intending to meet up with Redesdale's rebels, who were marching south like 'a whirlwind'.[15] History was repeating itself.

Edward's response was to dispatch a royal army commanded by William Herbert and Humphrey Stafford, his recently created earls of Pembroke and Devon, to intercept the northern rebels. On 26 July 1469, the two sides clashed on Edgecote Moor, near Banbury, where Pembroke's forces were routed 'in a most dreadful slaughter' despite his valiant efforts, Devon having arrived late to the field after a disagreement over billeting arrangements the night before. Pembroke, with his brother Richard Herbert, was taken to Northampton to await the arrival of Warwick, who unflinchingly ordered their execution upon arrival, followed by those of the queen's father Lord Rivers and brother John Wydeville on 12 August.[16]

A defenceless Edward was soon apprehended and held for a short period in Warwick Castle before he was transferred to a more secure fortress at Middleham, nestled in the heart of the Neville-controlled north. With King Henry still locked in the Tower of London, Warwick effectively had two kings of England in his control. His actions, killing royal commanders commissioned by the king and slaughtering close relations of the queen, were unjustifiable and unquestionably treasonous. They did, however, have wider implications for a twelve-year-old boy, Beaufort by blood if not by name.

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In November 1455, the king's half-brother Edmund Tudor, earl of Richmond, married his twelve-year-old ward Margaret Beaufort. Presumably keen to secure her lands in his own right, he quickly consummated the marriage. The result was the birth of their son Henry in Pembroke Castle on 28 January 1457. Richmond never saw his son, as he died in uncertain circumstances in Carmarthen in November 1456 shortly after a Yorkist force under command of William Herbert had imprisoned the earl. Taken into the care of her brother-in-law Jasper Tudor, Margaret was married in 1457 to Henry Stafford, a younger son of the duke of Buckingham and himself a grandson of Joan Beaufort through his mother Anne, her third marriage at the age of only fourteen. Clearly, what remained of the

senior Beaufort inheritance was a highly sought-after prize.

Henry Tudor, earl of Richmond from birth through his father and with royal Beaufort blood in his veins through his mother, was also much sought after. On 12 February 1461, Edward IV granted custody of the four-year-old Henry to his loyal servant Herbert, in exchange for a payment of £1,000.[17] Herbert was in the midst of an astonishing rise from minor Welsh squire to mighty English magnate, and in May 1461 was appointed Chamberlain of South Wales. Subsequently handed further positions of influence in the north, Herbert effectively ruled Wales as his own dominion for much of the 1460s. He had the complete trust of the Yorkist king, and once raised to the earldom of Pembroke in 1468, displacing the attainted Jasper Tudor in the process, was recognised as the highest-ranking Welshman in English society since the Edwardian conquest almost two hundred years before.[18] Despite such status, however, Margaret Beaufort couldn't have been content with the thought of her only son being entrusted to the very man complicit in her husband's death, but there was little she could do. Her son's destiny was out of her hands.

Despite the acrimony between the rival Tudor and Herbert earls of Pembroke and their affinities, Henry was afforded an honourable upbringing at Raglan Castle before William's death after Edgecote Moor deprived Margaret's son of the Yorkist guardian who had provided his Lancastrian ward a comfortable home. Herbert had even intended to marry Henry to his daughter Maud, uniting the two foremost Welsh families involved in the complex web of English politics.[19] After the earl's death, Henry's whereabouts are uncertain, although he probably remained in the company of Herbert's widow Anne Devereux until a decision was reached regarding his long-term status. Subsequent events involving his maternal relations, however, soon transformed Henry's fate; it would be his Beaufort connections, rather than Tudor, that would now shape his future.

Warwick's ascendancy couldn't last. Unlike Henry VI, his successor Edward was far more capable of ruling his kingdom, and the earl had no mandate to govern in his stead, particularly once he had

eliminated several unpopular councillors. Warwick failed to galvanise the nobles into supporting his actions, and widespread disorder and private feuding undermined his authority. As a result, he was forced to release Edward from captivity as the only figure from whom both lords and commons would accept orders. The king simply resumed control of his kingdom as though no offence had been committed. As he had in the past with Lancastrian dissidents, Edward offered the hand of peace to Warwick and Clarence, who could only sheepishly accept such magnanimity. The king did, however, enforce some changes; the earldom of Northumberland was stripped from Warwick's brother and restored to the Percys, with John Neville elevated to become Marquess Montagu. Edward then announced his intention to betroth his eldest daughter Elizabeth to Warwick's male heir, his nephew George, hoping to mollify the Nevilles.[20]

Warwick was not content. His ambition, his encompassing desire for complete rather than shared power, could not let him rest. Excluded from any serious influence, his thoughts again returned to replacing Edward on the throne with Clarence. Another rebellion surfaced in Lincolnshire in March 1470, prompting Edward to march north with an army to soundly defeat the uprising near Empingham. Documents found on the battlefield implicated Warwick and Clarence in fomenting the rebellion, and rather than defend themselves against allegations of treason when summoned by the king, the pair gathered their wives and belongings and fled the kingdom. Edward, no longer blind to their disloyalty, responded by seizing their lands and arresting Warwick's brother George, archbishop of York.[21]

Warwick's original plan to regroup and return to England to challenge Edward was crushed when he failed to gain entry to Calais, which remained loyal to the king. While moored at sea, the earl's daughter Isabel lost the child she was carrying with Clarence, and with little alternative, the beleaguered group sought refuge in France, already harbouring dozens of exiled Lancastrians. A reconciliation between both groups, and a pooling of their meagre resources, was inevitable if Edward was to be defeated. The chief obstacle to any agreement was Margaret of Anjou, who detested Warwick, the man

who above all others was the cause of her current woe.

The pair's much-anticipated meeting took place on 22 June 1470 at Angers, around a decade after they last met face to face, and with Louis XI playing host. After much intense discussion, which included Warwick sinking to his knees to theatrically beg Margaret for forgiveness for 'injuries and wrongs done to her in the past', it was agreed Prince Edward would marry the earl's youngest daughter Anne. In return, Warwick swore to be faithful to his new allies until his death.[22] Any plan to place Clarence on the throne was discarded, much to the duke's frustration, and Warwick was now expected to recover the crown for Lancaster if he wanted his descendants on the throne. From nowhere, it seemed, the Lancastrian cause suddenly breathed new life.

On 9 September 1470, Warwick and Clarence departed from La Hogue at the head of an army that included Lancastrian stalwarts, the earls of Pembroke and Oxford. They landed in southern Devon four days later. It was a shrewd decision; Edward expected Warwick to land in the north, but the south-west provided retainers loyal to the Beaufort, Courtenay and Tudor families, not to mention the queen herself. Proclamations were issued in King Henry's name, urging all men 'to prepare themselfs to fight against Edward duke of Yorke, which contrarye to al right, justice and law, had untrewly usurped the Croune',[23] and attracted widespread support in the region.

If Edward was confident of fending off the latest attack on his crown, his self-assurance faded when he discovered that Montagu, moving south from Yorkshire at the head of a sizable force, had defected to his brother's side, having previously been uninvolved with Warwick's scheming. The king, potentially trapped in the Midlands by a pincer movement, elected to flee, and with his brother Gloucester, brother-in-law Anthony Wydeville and a handful of other lords, sailed for Flanders to seek refuge with his reluctant brother-in-law Burgundy.[24] With the kingdom abandoned, Archbishop Neville entered London on 5 October and escorted the dishevelled Lancastrian king out of the Tower after five years' captivity. By 12 October, the

bishop of Novara reported Warwick had 'practically the whole of the island in his power',[25] a coup completed 'without the least slaughter or bloodshed'.[26] The so-called Readeption of Henry VI had begun.

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After a decade of Yorkist rule, the people of England once again had to get used to Henry VI sitting on the throne of England. Nothing had changed regarding his inability to personally govern. As Margaret of Anjou remained in France for the time being, it was Warwick who ruled England as a *de facto* protector, giving the earl the authority he had always craved. Parliament assembled on 15 November 1470, and although no records of the sessions survive, having presumably been destroyed at a later date, it can be assumed that much of the anti-Lancastrian legislation of previous years was reversed.

For example, the attainder against the Beauforts, who remained in France for the moment, was surely overturned. It is unclear the part Clarence played in the proceedings, but confirmation of his status as heir to the throne, should Henry VI's line fail, was presumably contentious to the Holland and Beaufort families, both members of the wider Lancastrian bloodline. Notably, Clarence was also permitted to retain the lordship and honour of Richmond for life, to the exclusion of Margaret Beaufort's son Henry Tudor, by now reunited with his uncle Jasper Tudor.[27]

The Lancastrian-Neville hybrid government soon encountered difficulties. Dispossessed and attainted Lancastrians naturally anticipated the return of their lands and titles, while those in possession, such as Warwick, Clarence and Montagu, had little desire to hand over any properties they had accumulated in recent years. An uneasy impasse existed, and the regime may have eventually prospered had it not been for Warwick's aggressive foreign policy. Finally empowered to act as he deemed fit, Warwick openly supported Louis XI in the latter's determination to bring Burgundy to heel. Duke Charles, despite his commitment towards his Lancastrian kin, responded to such threats by supporting Edward IV's plans to invade

England, having hitherto been ambivalent about their presence in his duchy.

News of Charles's summits with Edward were 'violently opposed' by Edmund Beaufort and the duke of Exeter, both still claiming a pension at the Burgundian court despite the presence of their Yorkist adversaries, and according to Philippe de Commines, who was probably present, the pair used 'all their artifice to keep him firm to King Henry's interest'.[28] Tudor chronicler Edward Hall expanded on Edmund's opposition, claiming he cried that 'it was bothe ungodly, unprincely, and unnaturall, to exalte and set up a straunger, having no right, and to depose and deprive his naturall kynsman'.[29] Just as Charles's father Philip could not be swayed by Cardinal Beaufort's pleading in 1435, neither could the current duke be influenced. Instead, he pledged noney, men and ships to Edward. It was a bizarre situation all around; a Yorkist like Warwick was in charge of the Lancastrian government, while a Lancastrian-inclined duke in Burgundy was financing a Yorkist conspiracy.

Edward managed to amass a modest force of thirty-six ships and 2,300 men, and landed at Ravenspur in Yorkshire on 14 March 1471, the very same location where Henry of Bolingbroke had disembarked in 1399. Unlike Bolingbroke, Edward failed to find much support for his enterprise in the north and moved south into the East Midlands where he found a more favourable response. Upon reaching Coventry, where Warwick was based, Edward tried numerous times to lure his cousin from behind the town walls, without success. Compounding matters for the threatened Lancastrian government was Edward's reconciliation with Clarence on 3 April. Together with Gloucester, all three brothers of York, united once again, purposefully headed for London.[30]

In February, the Beaufort brothers had also returned to England after six years in exile,[31] perhaps finally assured of Warwick's loyalty and frustrated at Burgundy's burgeoning support of Edward. With the reversal of their attainders still going through parliament, they were initially based in London, probably expected to add some military

weight to the defence of the capital. On 6 April, however, with news reaching the city of a substantial Yorkist host moving south, 'the duke of Somerset and other of kynge Henryes frendes saw the world thus sodaynly changed' and fled, leaving their sovereign unprotected and alone in the bishop's palace. Their destination was Weymouth on the south coast, where Margaret of Anjou was expected to arrive from France any day. It is telling, in the Lancastrian hour of need, that the Beauforts flocked to Margaret rather than to Warwick, for whom they probably never cared. Their loyalty to the queen was laudable, but leaving London defenceless was a disastrous strategic error that exposed their inexperience as military commanders. On 11 April, Edward and his brothers entered the city without any resistance, and having assumed control, returned Henry VI to the Tower.[32]

Edwards was reunited with his queen, who had given birth to a son in sanctuary at Westminster Abbey, and having held his heir for the first time, he now resolved to destroy the Lancastrians once and for all. Hearing that Warwick had finally emerged from Coventry and was marching south, supported by Exeter and Oxford, the Yorkist king gathered his troops and went to meet him. The two forces clashed just north of Barnet on the misty Easter morning of 14 April 1471, when Oxford on the Lancastrian right flank quickly overwhelmed Lord Hastings on the Yorkist left.

Having initially chased Hastings' men from the field, Oxford led his men back into battle, but with low visibility, found himself under fire from his fellow Lancastrian commander Montagu, who erroneously thought Oxford's badge of 'star with rays' was the Yorkist 'sun in splendour'. As Oxford's men fled crying 'Treasoune! Treasoune!' the Lancastrian forces collapsed.[33] Montagu was killed, prompting Warwick to try to escape himself, but in unclear circumstances, he was apprehended and slain. A noteworthy casualty on the Yorkists' side was Henry Stafford, Margaret Beaufort's husband and incidentally another grandson of Joan Beaufort. He later died from wounds suffered during the fighting. Though the day belonged to Edward and his two brothers, Clarence and Gloucester, the trio couldn't afford to celebrate their victory just yet.

On 13 April, after several weather-related setbacks, Margaret of Anjou finally departed from Honfleur with her son Edward, landing in Weymouth the following day as battle raged at Barnet some 140 miles away. Margaret's party headed north from the coast and sought shelter in Cerne Abbey, where the following day she was reunited with Edmund and John Beaufort, who possibly brought confirmation of Warwick's defeat. The author of the semi-official Yorkist source *The Arrivall,* although not privy to the summit, claims the Beauforts,with the Courtenay earl of Devon, comforted the 'right hevy and sory' Lancastrian queen and prince 'and put them in good hope that, albeit they had lost one felde', their force was made 'rathar strongar' by Warwick's defeat. The Beauforts, claimed the *Arrivall,* believed they would still be able to assemble so 'great puisaunce of people in dyvars partis of England, trewly asswred unto theyr partye'.[34] Considering the brothers' likely hatred of Warwick, the man chiefly responsible for the deaths of their father and elder brother, and the fact Edmund could now assume command of the Lancastrian army under the nominal leadership of the young Prince Edward,[35] such a proactive reaction seems possible.

With a desperate need to reinforce their ranks, men were dispatched into the surrounding counties of Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire 'to arredy and arays the people', with Cornwall and Devon also targeted. With the Beauforts and Courtenay considered 'the old enheritors of that contrie' by the locals, they had little difficulty in attracting support. Sufficiently bolstered, the main host at Cerne then departed for Exeter, where it was hoped the presence of the Lancastrian prince would encourage further backing before moving on to Glastonbury.[36] With Jasper Tudor raising his considerable affinity in Wales, the decision was taken to head north rather than towards London, with the plan to advance on to Cheshire and Lancashire where they were 'quite confident that the nobles and people in those parts' would be 'well affected to the Lancastrian line' of the old duke, John of Gaunt.[37]

By 30 April, the Lancastrians had reached Bath via Taunton and Wells, and the following day had moved to Bristol where they

gathered money, men and artillery. Edward IV had become aware of Margaret's landing on 17 April and decisively assembled a fresh force to head west to deal with the latest threat to his crown. It was a decision that ultimately secured his throne. On 27 April, he issued a proclamation reiterating his right to be king while declaring the Lancastrians, including 'Edmund Beauford, calling himself duke of Somerset' and his brother John, to be mere rebels.[38]

Words aside, Edward was under no illusion he had to militarily defeat his adversaries, and he continued to pursue the Lancastrians, who attempted to conceal their route by dispatching decoys to Sudbury Hill. In reality, on 2 May, Margaret's army left Bristol, 'travelyng all that nyght' through Berkeley towards Gloucester where they hoped to cross the Severn. The deception would have worked had Edward not found out in the early hours through his scouts, dispatching a messenger to command Gloucester's governor Richard Beauchamp to deny the Lancastrians entry, which he duly did at ten o'clock on the morning of the 3rd. With not enough time to besiege the town into submission, Margaret, the Beauforts and the rest of their army had little alternative but to push on towards the next town, with a crossing, Tewkesbury. They arrived around four o'clock in the afternoon, ending a punishing forty-five-mile slog 'in a fowle contrye' without 'any good refresshynge'. While the mounted soldiers were 'ryght werye of that jorwney, as so were theyr horses', the footmen, who comprised the greater part of the force, were utterly exhausted and could proceed no further. With Edward relentless in pursuit, the decision was taken, probably with Beaufort input, to halt the march and prepare for the inevitable battle.[39]

As his father and elder brother had before him, it was now Edmund Beaufort's turn to prepare his army to oppose an advancing Yorkist force. He adopted a strong defensive position near Tewkesbury Abbey, with the River Avon to his rear and facing 'fowle lanes, and depe dikes, and many hedges with hylls, and valleys'. According to the author of the *Arrviall*, it was a 'ryght evill place to approache, as cowlde well have bene devysed', suggesting Edmund had wisely picked his spot. On the morning of Saturday 4 May, approach Edward

did, his army ‘in good array’ and displaying their assorted battle standards. In response, one imagines the Lancastrians raised their own banners, the Beaufort portcullis flying defiantly above the heads of Edmund and John Beaufort.[40] Margaret had retreated to a local religious house, her seventeen-year-old son remaining on the battlefield for his first engagement, a battle that determined not only his destiny but those of the soldiers assembled around him, including the Beauforts.

The Lancastrians organised into three battles, with the right commanded by Edmund, the centre by Lord Wenlock and Prince Edward, and the left by Devon. Wenlock’s presence may have been contentious. As a Yorkist follower, he had been allowed to seize some Beaufort goods in 1467 before defecting with Warwick.

Edward’s army was led by himself, his youngest brother Gloucester, and Hastings, with the dukes of Clarence and Norfolk also present. As the Lancastrians’ strong position was ‘difficult to be assayled’, Gloucester used his archers to unleash a ‘right-a-sharpe shwre’ of arrows, followed with cannons which ‘so sore oppressyd’ their enemy. This shower of arrows may have prompted Edmund Beaufort’s next move. The author of the *Arrivall* reported:

> Edmond, called Duke of Somarset, having that day the vawarde, whithar it were for that he and his fellowshipe were sore annoyed in the place where they were, as well with gonnes-shott, as with shot of arrows, which they ne wowld nor durst abyde, or els, of great harte or corage, knyghtly and manly avaunsyd hymselfe, with his fellowshipe, soemwhat asyde-hand the Kyngs vaware, and, by certayne pathes and wayes therefore afore purveyed, and to the Kynges party unknowne, he departyd out of the field, passyd a lane, and came into a fayre place, or cloos, even afore the Kynge where he was embatteled, and, from the hill that was in that one of the closes, he set right fiercely upon th’end of the Kyngs battayle.[41]

It is therefore unclear whether Edmund's fierce attack was born of desperation, courage or overconfidence. It may even have been a combination of all three factors. Edward Hall later generously considered the move 'more couragious than circumspect'.[42] The decision to abandon his defensive position was undoubtedly a risky manoeuvre, and Edward IV 'full manly set forthe' upon Edmund's men, 'and with great vyolence', forced them back up the hill and into Gloucester's retinue who responded with unbridled ferocity. Now Edward's tactical mastery prevailed; before the battle, the king had positioned two hundred mounted spearmen in a wood a quarter mile from the battlefield. Recognising a 'goode opportunitie t'employ themself well', they emerged 'all at ones, upon the Duke of Somerset'. Edmund and his soldiers, already on the back foot, were 'gretly dismaied and abasshed' when they encountered the extra troops and started to flee in panic, some heading back into the lanes and dykes, and some for a nearby meadow. Most were brutally cut down before they could reach safety, their blood staining the earth where they fell. The terror among the Lancastrians gradually spread through the ranks, and their resistance collapsed. The battle as a contest was over, and the slaughter begun in earnest.[43]

Edmund Beaufort could only watch with dismay as his men were butchered all around him, recalling the gruesome scene that greeted his brother Henry at Towton a decade earlier and his father at St Albans in 1455. Hall recounts a dramatic confrontation between Edmund and Wenlock, who had failed to engage his forces, with Beaufort accusing his fellow commander of treason before taking his axe and caving in Wenlock's skull with such savagery his brains were exposed.[44] No contemporary chronicle mentions such an incident and Hall did have a penchant for theatrical embellishment, although that is not to say Edmund and Wenlock did not clash in some way.

With escape into the surrounding countryside presumably unfeasible, perhaps due to tiredness or injury, Edmund fled into the nearby abbey, which he hoped would provide sanctuary against the devastating bloodshed occurring outside. It was maybe then that he learnt his brother John was one of many lying dead on the battlefield

– with young Prince Edward, for whose future they had all been fighting. Fabyan and Hall later claimed the prince had been brought in front of the Yorkist leaders and callously murdered, but the contemporary, if biased, *Arrivall* suggests he was 'slayne, in the fielde',[45] as does Warkworth.[46] According to the latter chronicle, Edward IV entered the abbey after his victory and promised to pardon those inside. If Edmund believed his life had been spared, however, he was wrong. Edward's fingers had been burnt once before by showing clemency to the Beauforts.

On 6 May 1471, two days after the battle, Edmund was dragged from the abbey and 'browght afore the Kynge's brothar, the Duke of Gloucestar and Constable, and the Duke of Norfolk, Marshall of England'. After a trial in front of the two dukes, Edmund Beaufort, the last remaining Beaufort descended in the male line, was charged with having 'provoked and continuyd the great rebellyon that so long had endured in the land'. Accordingly, he was 'judged to deathe' alongside around a dozen other supporters.[47] With one swift swing of an executioner's axe in the crowded Tewkesbury marketplace, the House of Beaufort was no more.

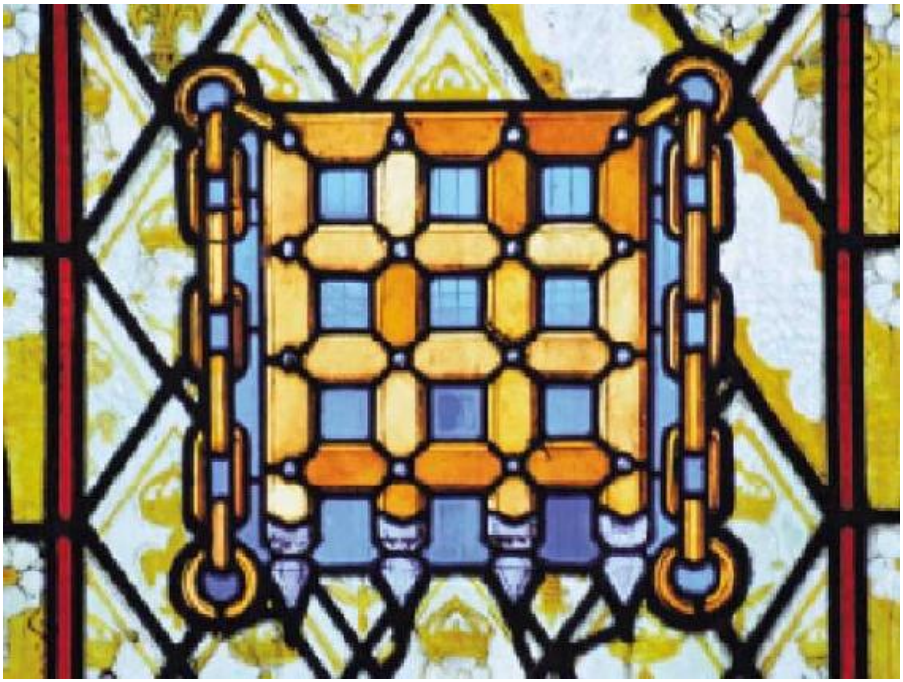
*

The bodies of Prince Edward, Edmund Beaufort and John Beaufort were not despoiled after the battle, nor were their heads spiked above any gateways or bridges. Orders from Edward IV were that they were to be simply buried in Tewkesbury Abbey, with the Beauforts interred in St James's Chapel, the location of the present cathedral shop, and the prince near the altar.[48] A few days later, a broken Margaret of Anjou, with no son left to fight for, meekly surrendered to Edward, and on 21 May, with the humiliated Lancastrian queen displayed in a chariot, the triumphant Yorkist army marched through the streets of London. That very night, Henry VI, a 'gode, simple and innocent man',[49] died, according to the *Arrivall*, 'of pure displeasure, and melencoly'.[50] The truth, betrayed by Henry's body bleeding all over the floor of St Paul's the following day, was that he had been 'putte to

dethe'[51] by persons unknown.

When John Beaufort died in 1444, he left no sons, only a solitary legitimate daughter, Margaret. His brother and successor, Edmund Beaufort, fared better, leaving three sons after his own death in 1455, but each of those, Henry, Edmund and John, failed to have any legitimate issue. In short, the Beaufort line had come to a sudden end on the battlefield at Tewkesbury almost one hundred years after the first Beaufort came into the world. With the senior Lancastrian male line also terminating with the deaths of Henry VI and Prince Edward, it is unsurprising that a Milanese ambassador noted on 17 June 1471 that Edward IV had 'chosen to crush the seed', for that is exactly what it appeared he had done.[52]

Shortly after the catastrophe at Tewkesbury, however, a small vessel left Tenby harbour in south-west Wales, having evaded all Yorkist attempts at capture. Aboard were Jasper Tudor and his fourteen-year-old nephew Henry Tudor, the son of Margaret Beaufort. Fourteen years later, the Tudors returned to Wales at the head of an army that included Henry's cousin Charles Somerset, the illegitimate son of Henry Beaufort, the 2nd Duke killed at Hexham in 1464. Although not Beaufort by name, the pair were Beaufort by blood, and at Bosworth Field on 22 August 1485, the Portcullis and Yale standards once again fluttered proudly in the English breeze.

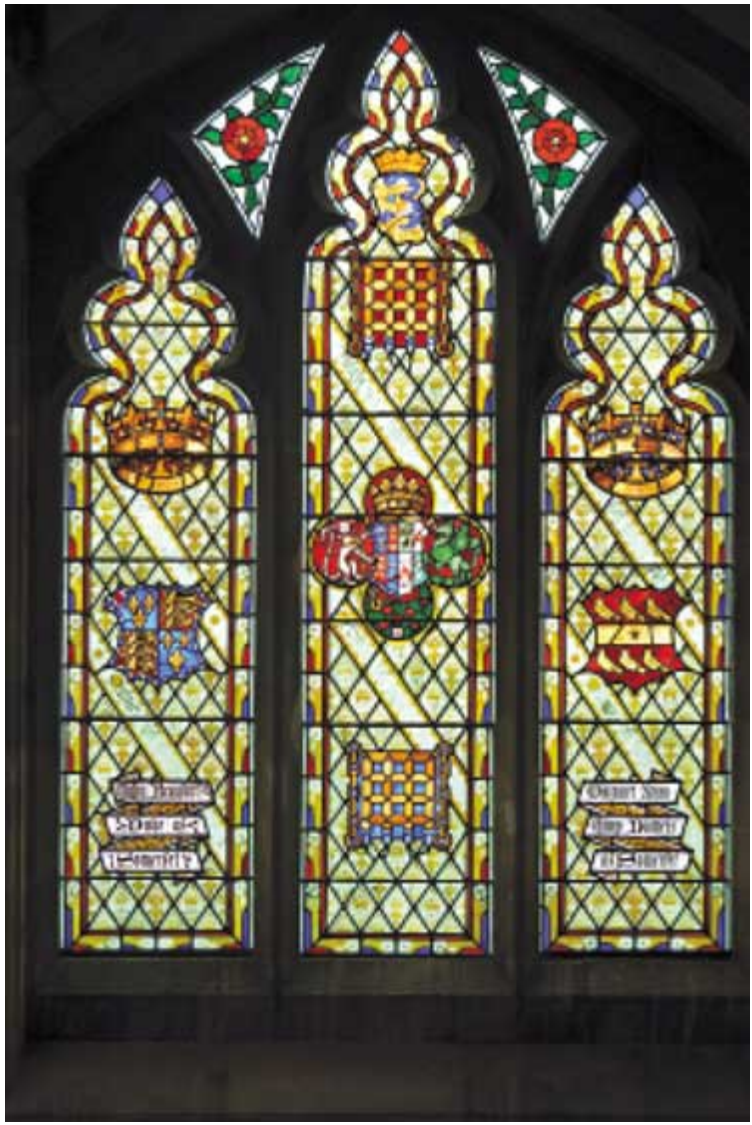


Beaufort Portcullis, Wimborne Minister. (By permission of Wimborne Minster)

Crowned Beaufort arms and portcullis, Royal 19 B XVII f. 1v. (Courtesy of British Library)

Beaufort coat of arms, Hospital of St Cross, Winchester. (By permission of the Hospital of St Cross)

Cardinal Beaufort coat of arms, Southwark Cathedral. (By permission of Southwark Cathedral)



Beaufort Window, Wimborne Minster. (By permission of Wimborne Minster)

Beaufort Companye re-enactment captain.

Beaufort Companye re-enactment group.

Lincoln Chancery, possible childhood home of the Beauforts.

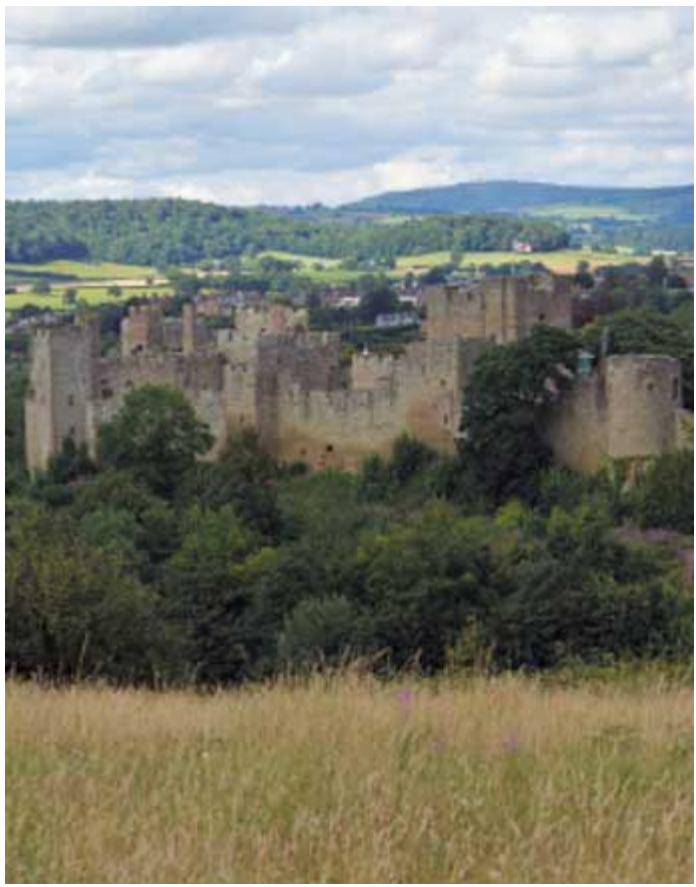
Remains of Kettlethorpe Manor, home of Katherine Swynford.

Lincoln Cathedral, where John of Gaunt married Katherine Swynford in 1396.

Tomb of Katherine Swynford and her daughter Joan Beaufort. (By permission of Lincoln Cathedral)

Raby Castle, home of Joan Beaufort and Ralph Neville. (Courtesy of Dave Cooil/ Raby Castle)

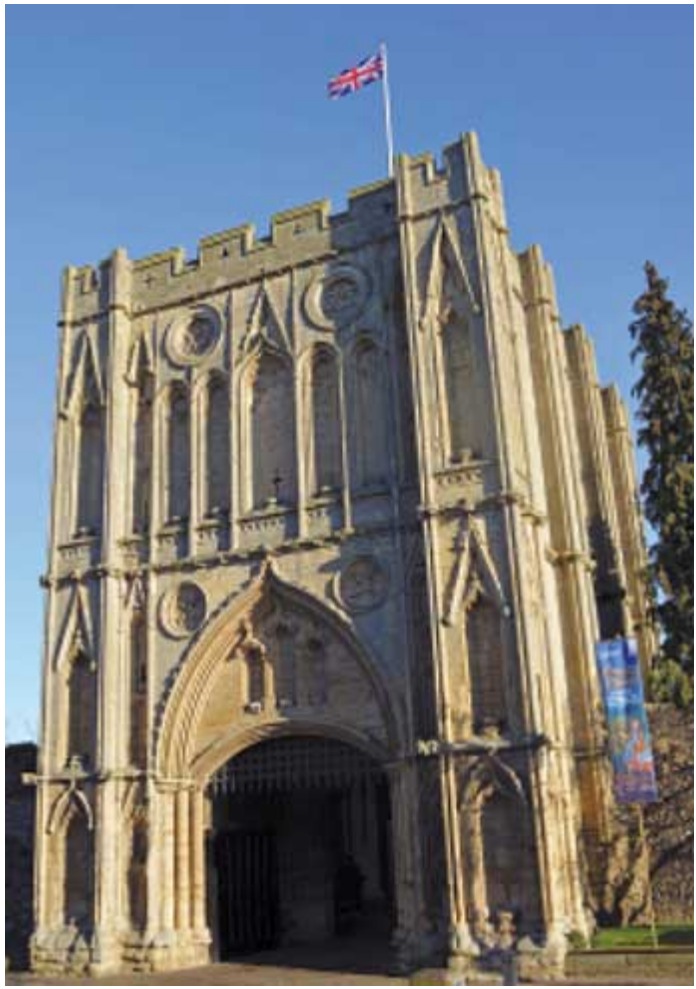
Middleham Castle, home of Joan Beaufort and Ralph Neville.



Ludlow Castle, where Thomas Beaufort was captain.

Rose Window, Winchester Palace, the London base of Cardinal Beaufort.

Wolvesey Castle, residence of Henry Beaufort as Bishop of Winchester.



Bury St Edmunds Abbey gateway.

Howden Manor, where Joan Beaufort died in 1440.

Tomb of Joan Beaufort and Ralph Neville, St Mary's Church, Staindrop.

Wimborne Minster, Dorset.

Tomb of John Beaufort and Margaret Beauchamp, Wimborne Minster. (By Permission of Wimborne Minster)

John Beaufort, 1st Duke of Somerset.

Corfe Castle.

Hospital of St Cross almshouses, Winchester. (By permission of the Hospital of St Cross)

Statue of Cardinal Beaufort, Hospital of St Cross. (By permission of the Hospital of St Cross)

Cardinal Beaufort's chantry, Winchester Cathedral. (By permission of Winchester Cathedral)

Tomb of Cardinal Beaufort. (By permission of Winchester Cathedral)

Plaque commemorating Edmund Beaufort's death, St Albans.

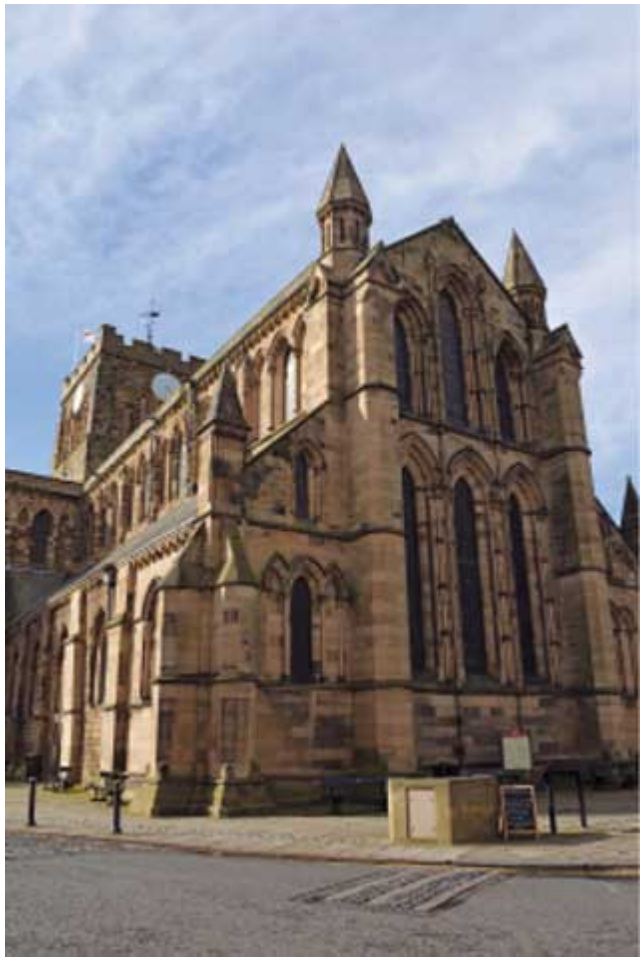
Edmund Beaufort Statue, St Mary's Church, Warwick. (By permission of Collegiate Church of St Mary's, Warwick)

St Albans Abbey Lady Chapel, where Edmund Beaufort was buried in 1455. (By permission of St Albans Abbey and Cathedral)

Alnwick Castle, Northumberland.

Bamburgh Castle, Northumberland.

Warkworth Castle, Northumberland.



Hexham Abbey, where Henry Beaufort was buried in 1464.

The Bloody Meadow, Tewkesbury.

Tewkesbury Abbey and battlefield memorial.

Tewkesbury Marketplace, where Edmund Beaufort was beheaded in 1471.

St James' Chapel, Tewkesbury, where Edmund and John Beaufort were buried after the Battle of Tewkesbury. (By permission of Vicar and Church Wardens of Tewkesbury Abbey)

Margaret Beaufort, the mother of the Tudor dynasty. (Courtesy of Ripon Cathedral)

Rouen Castle, location of Joan of Arc's imprisonment and surrendered by Edmund Beaufort. (Courtesy of Chris Cox)

Notes

Abbreviations

Adam – The Chronicle of Adam of Usk

Arrivall – Historie of the Arrivall of Edward IV in England and the Finall Recoverye of his Kingdomes from Henry VI

Bale – Bale's Chronicle, Six Town Chronicles of England

Brut – The Brut or The Chronicles of England

CIPM – Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem

CCR – Calendar of Close Rolls

CFR – Calendar of Fine Rolls

Chron. Ang. – Incerti Scriptoris Chronicon Angliae

Chron. Lon. – The Chronicles of London

CPReg – Calendar of Papal Register

CPR – Calendar of Patent Rolls

Croyland – Ingulph's Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland

CSP Milan – Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts in the Archives and Collections of Milan 1385–1618

CSP Venice – Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice

Eng. Chron. – An English Chronicle of the Reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI

Foedera – Hardy's Syllabus of the Documents Relating to England and Other Kingdoms Contained in the Collection Known as Rymer's Foedera

JoG – John of Gaunt's Register

LAP – Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Wars of the English in France

PL – The Paston Letters

POPC – Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England

PROME – Parliamentary Rolls of Medieval England

RotParl – Rotuli Parliamentorum

Traison et Mort – Chronique de la Traison et Mort de Richard Deux Roy Dengleterre

TNA – The National Archives

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22. '*Milan: 1470*' in *CSP Milan* pp. 134–145
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29. Hall p. 289
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31. Warkworth p. 12
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33. Warkworth p. 16
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36. *Arrivall* p. 23
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38. *Foedera* p. 702
39. *Arrivall* pp. 26–28
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